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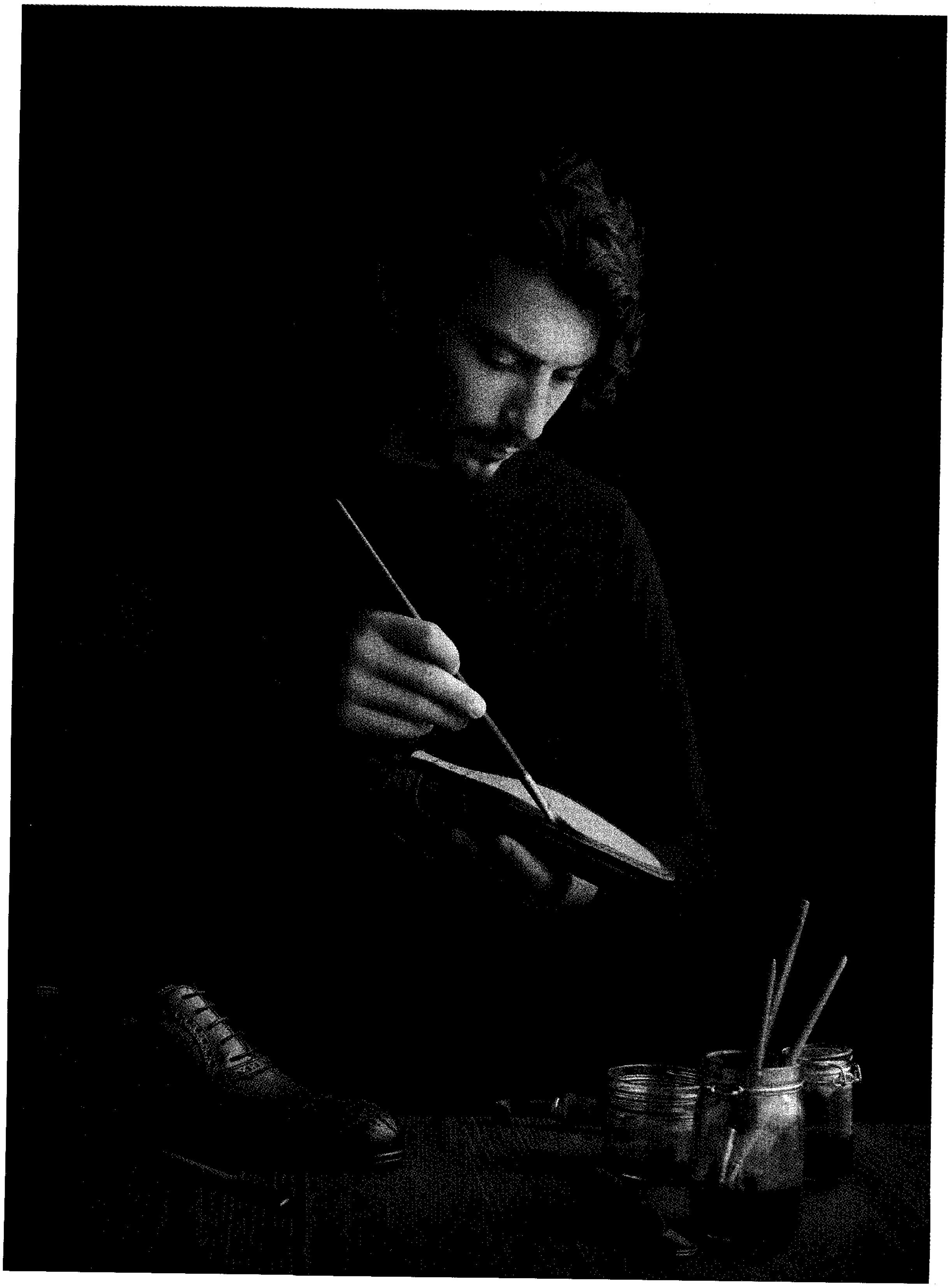

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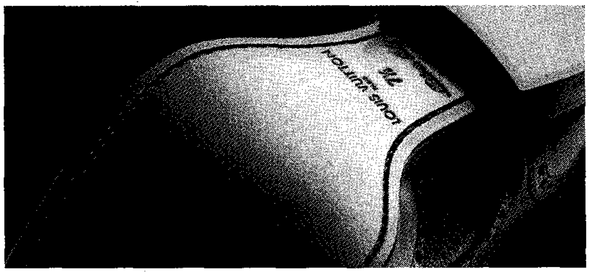

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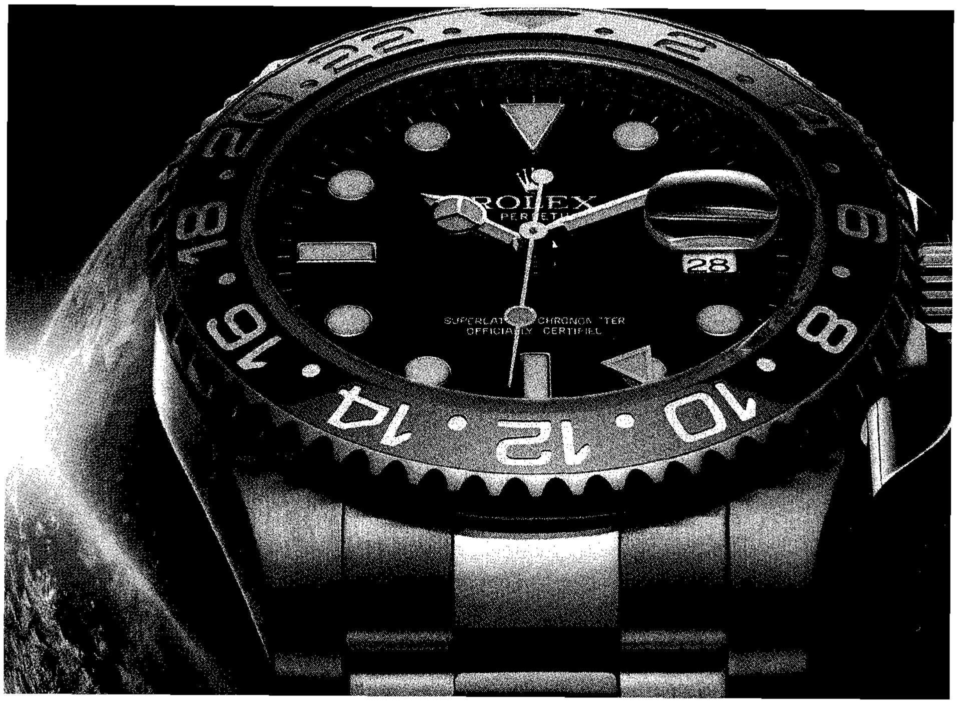
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David Foster Wallace (Fiction, p. 76) died in 2008. His unfinished novel "The Pale King" will be published in 2011.

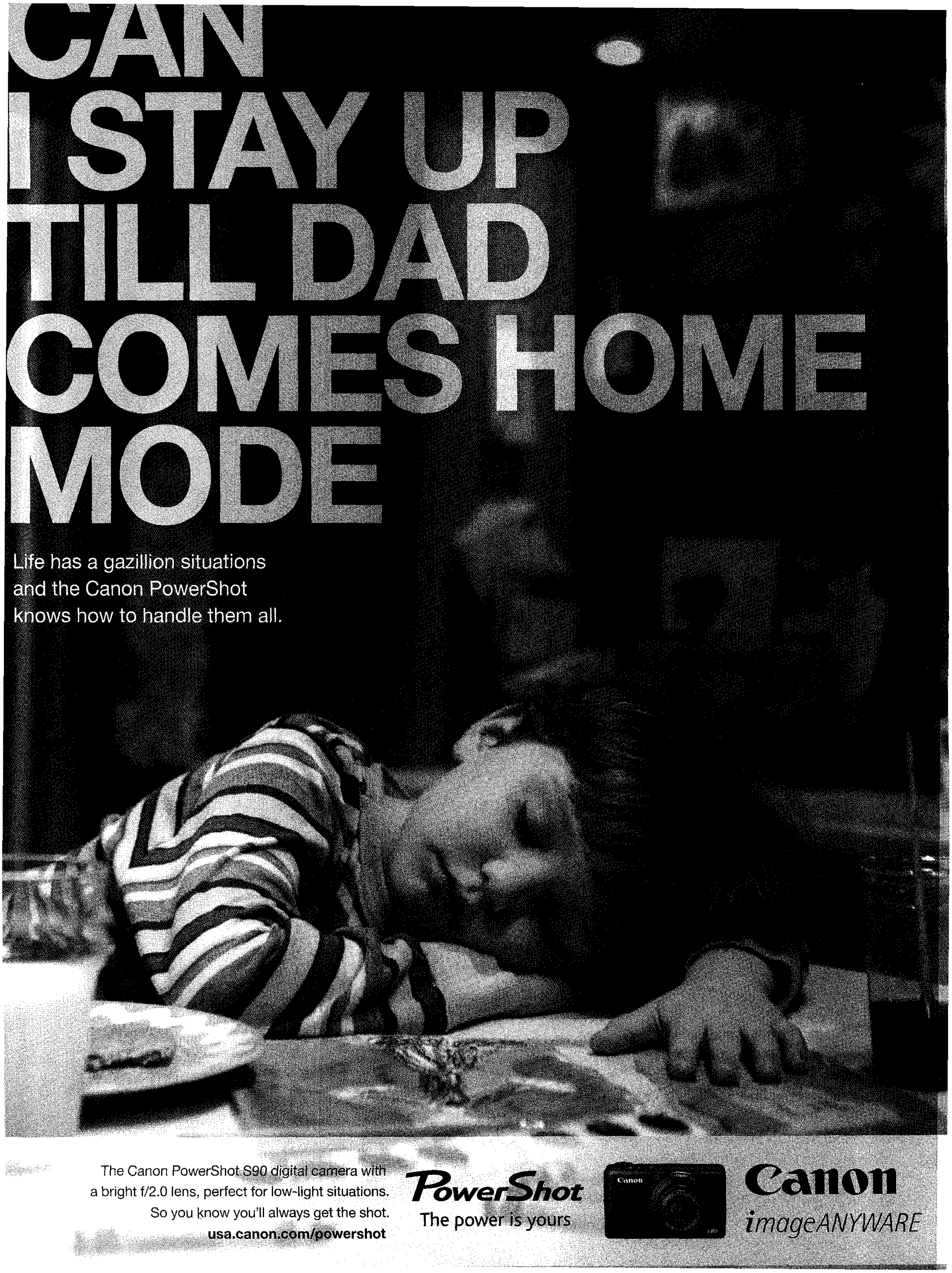
Simon Armitage (Poem, p. 80) has written several books of poetry, including a translation of "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." His next collection, "Seeing Stars," is due out in April.

John Lahr (The Theatre, p. 82), the magazine's senior drama critic, is working on a biography of Tennessee Williams.

John McWhorter (Books, p. 86) is a Senior Fellow of Public Policy at the Manhattan Institute and a lecturer at Columbia University. "Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue: The Untold Story of English" is his most recent book.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Hendrik Hertzberg and *Steve Coll* discuss Afghanistan with readers in a live chat, and with *Dorothy Wickenden* on the Political Scene podcast. / Audio: *John McWhorter* and *Blake Eskin* listen to Louis Armstrong. / Top-ten lists and year-end roundups from *David Denby, Nancy Franklin, Sasha Frere-Jones, Peter Schjeldahl, Judith Thurman*, and the rest of our critics. / Video: *James Surowiecki* interviews Dan Vasella, of Novartis; a new finger painting by *Jorge Colombo; Richard Brody's* DVD of the Week. / Cartoon Kit: Create your own desert-island cartoon. / A complete archive of issues, back to 1925.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THANKS TO FEMINISM

Ariel Levy, in describing the shift in feminist strategies from liberation to personal achievement, writes, "Identity politics isn't much concerned with abstract ideals, like justice. It's a version of the old spoils system: align yourself with other members of a group—Irish, Italian, women, or whatever—and try to get a bigger slice of the resources that are being allocated" (Books, November 16th). Yet that characterization overlooks the vast improvements in the material realities of women's lives that have been achieved by feminists of this ilk. The beauty of identity politics as an ideal and a practice of social justice is that it has allowed women to form a coalition across race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability—the antithesis of divisiveness—to improve the particularity of experience for them and their children.

Roseanne Giannini Quinn
Women's and Gender Studies Program
Santa Clara University
Santa Clara, Calif.

JUDGING THE JUDGES

It was edifying to read John Colapinto's description of the technically rigorous training required of Michelin inspectors as well as their fastidious criteria for holding restaurants accountable for non-food-related aspects of the dining experience (establishments that let their toilet paper run out in the restrooms, please take note) ("Lunch with M.," November 23rd). It may be worth observing that the excruciatingly standardized Michelin rating system as applied in the United States seems to mean exactly what it should to the people it affects professionally and personally, while it has taken on a disproportionate significance for those who comment on the restaurant world online. When my husband, the chef Antoine Camin, was awarded one Michelin star for his work at La Goulue in the 2006 edition, after having been there just one year, no one was more pleasantly surprised than he. When, in the 2008 edition, it was taken away, he was understandably disappointed but definitely not aggrieved. So it has always been with slightly annoyed amusement that we have read over the years the numerous articles, blog entries, etc., decrying with fervor, as if they had been wronged, the unworthiness and outright absurdity of La Goulue's *macaron*. Yet no one we know in the industry has ever exhibited a similar brand of invective toward other recipients or those who were passed over. Perhaps they're simply too busy working in an environment whose pace rarely provides the luxury of measuring offense.

Elaine Vivar Camin
Brooklyn, N.Y.

After reading Colapinto's article, I felt as though the curtain had been pulled back on Oz. At lunch with Colapinto at Jean Georges, the Michelin inspector's reactions to her meal could not have been more nondescript: "Everything was perfect"; "It's so Jean-Georges"; "It's so complex." While it may not be a fair comparison, the article on Jonathan Gold is an interesting juxtaposition ("The Scavenger," by Dana Goodyear, November 9th). Gold is able to persuade his legion of readers to eat some of the most bizarre foods imaginable because he so vividly describes what the food tastes like. While I don't expect that winning a Pulitzer Prize should be a requirement for being a Michelin inspector, I do expect that the inspectors should be able to articulate why an entrée is excellent beyond just saying, "It's *textbook*."

Seth Levi
Philadelphia, Pa.

FOOD FLAVORS

There is a reason that the connections between taste laboratories and the food companies they serve are treated like state secrets, as Raffi Khatchadourian suggests ("The Taste Makers," November 23rd). It is not simply that the food industry doesn't want us to know that "outside" companies produce the flavors that go into its products; what it seems to want is an active forgetting on the consumer's part that these highly processed foods basically have no connection not just to the "natural" product they claim to be but to anything a normal person would even consider food. This is what allows us, for instance, to eat vanilla flavoring that is made of petrochemicals or to dip our "naturally flavored" tortilla chips into something that has the word "guacamole" on the label but is essentially starch, oil, and salt.

Assenka Oksiloff
Roosevelt, N.J.

BIG-SCREEN DREAMS

I was pleased to see my work on F. Scott Fitzgerald's screenplays discussed in Arthur Krystal's article, but I have to disagree with Krystal's central thesis in discussing Fitzgerald's screenplay work ("Slow Fade," November 16th). Fitzgerald was just finding himself as a screenwriter when he died, and his earlier work in films, as Krystal and I can both agree, I think, was fatally compromised by either his producers or the Hays/Breen office. There is an outline for the ending for "Infidelity" by Fitzgerald, which I published at the end of my book as an appendix; it lays out pretty clearly how the screenplay would have ended. By my estimation, the script was more than four-fifths finished when Fitzgerald was forced to abandon it because of censorship concerns; using the outline, a complete script for the film could be easily constructed. I would argue that Fitzgerald, far from being "a little camera crazy" in his script for "Infidelity," was finally getting a chance to put his own visual sensibility on paper without the interference of others; too bad he never got the chance to see it on the screen.

Wheeler Winston Dixon
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•

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
13	14	15	9	10	11	12

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
LOVE'S LABOR

In 2005, Shakespeare's Globe, under the direction of Mark Rylance, staged a lovely "Measure for Measure." The company returns with a new director, Dominic Dromgoole, to present "Love's Labour's Lost," at Pace University's Michael Schimmel Center, for a limited run of two weeks. (See page 10.)

NIGHT LIFE
CITY SIRENS

Carol Lipnik, Little Annie, and Rachelle Garniez are local singers with uncanny vocal ranges, outrageous lyrical approaches, and wild imaginations. Just one of them on a bill would be sufficiently appealing. This week, however, all three women share the same stage on the same night at Galapagos, a proposition that is nearly irresistible. (See page 12.)

ART
FAST TRACK

It's hard to separate fact from fiction in the work of the Israeli-born, Berlin-based artist Omer Fast, whose films and videos challenge the reliability of both history and memory. The Whitney exhibits his new piece "Nostalgia," a three-part installation about a Nigerian refugee seeking asylum in London. (See page 15.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
ADAMS' APPLE

This week, New York lays out the red carpet for the post-minimalist titan John Adams: Juilliard's new-music group Axiom performs his music at Alice Tully Hall and (Le) Poisson Rouge, and Carnegie Hall (with the Orchestra of St. Luke's) mounts the oratorio "El Niño," which was composed in 2000. (See page 21.)

MOVIES
NUT CITY

New York, the capital of culture and of finance, is also the center of American lunacy, as seen in Film Forum's "Madcap Manhattan" series. The silent madness of Harold Lloyd in "Speedy" and Buster Keaton in "The Cameraman" is matched by the voluble humor of, among others, Cary Grant in Leo McCarey's "The Awful Truth" and Judy Holliday in George Cukor's "It Should Happen to You." (See page 25.)

Danielle de Niese, who is singing at the Met this week. Photograph by Lisa Kereszi.

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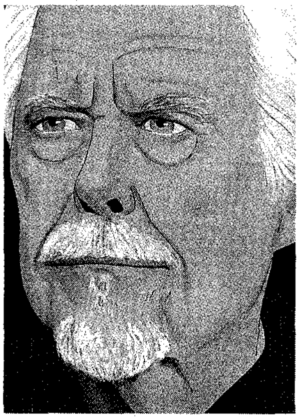
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
MR. AMERICA

Mitchell Zuckoff's new oral biography "Robert Altman" is a brilliantly researched, near-cinematic evocation of how the boy from Kansas City became one of the twentieth century's greatest native Americans. Altman, who came of age as a TV director, was his generation's John Ford. But Altman was the messier, more reality-based artist. Over the years, he developed a loose, improvisational style that encouraged overlapping speech and other signifiers of emotional entanglement—or of isolation. Altman paid a price for his difference. He didn't have anything approaching a hit until 1970, with "M*A*S*H," when he was forty-four. And yet that success was short-lived. Altman was soon struggling to finance his films—he made at least one with his own money. But Altman never gave up creating his cinematic portraits of people on the margins—con artists, prostitutes, gamblers, thieves, clowns, movie executives—if only to shed light on the falsity behind his country's seemingly indefatigable, desperate pursuit of success.

—*Hilton Als*



LARA TOMLIN

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

A BRITISH SUBJECT
As part of "Brits Off Broadway," Nichola McAuliffe wrote and stars in this drama, based on the true story of a British man who was tried in Pakistan for the murder of a taxi-driver. Hannah Eidinow directs. In previews. Opens Dec. 13. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE EMPEROR JONES
The Irish Rep production of Eugene O'Neill's drama, directed by Ciaran O'Reilly, moves to SoHo Playhouse. Previews begin Dec. 15. (15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)

THE GREAT RECESSION
The Flea presents ten-minute plays by Thomas Bradshaw, Sheila Callaghan, Erin Courtney, Will Eno, Itamar Moses, and Adam Rapp. In previews. Opens Dec. 10. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

JUAN AND JOHN
The Public LAB program premières this play, directed and performed by Roger Guenveur Smith, with sound and video design by Marc Anthony Thompson, about a riot in 1965. In previews. Opens Dec. 13. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC
Catherine Zeta-Jones, Angela Lansbury, and Alexander Hanson star in Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler's musical, based on Ingmar Bergman's "Smiles of a Summer Night," a romantic comedy revolving around the affairs of an actress at a Swedish country house. Trevor Nunn directs. In previews. Opens Dec. 13. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST
Dominic Dromgoole directs the Shakespeare's Globe production. In previews. Opens Dec. 11. (Michael Schimmel Center at Pace University, 3 Spruce St. 212-868-4444.)

MISALLIANCE
Jeff Steitzer directs the Pearl's production of George Bernard Shaw's 1909 comedy of manners, set on the English country estate of a newly wealthy underwear tycoon. In previews. Opens Dec. 13. (City Center Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE: PART 2
Horton Foote's three-part play cycle continues with the second installment, in repertory with Part 1, produced by Signature Theatre Company and Hartford Stage. Michael Wilson directs. In previews. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-352-3101.)

RED NOIR
Judith Malina directs a thriller by Anne Waldman, about a female detective who investigates ecological crimes. In previews. Opens Dec. 10. (Living Theatre, 21 Clinton St. 212-352-3101.)

NOW PLAYING

AMERICAN TREASURE
The novel experimental playwright collective 13P premières the much anticipated new play of its ninth "P" (playwright), Julia Jarcho, who also directs. A terse and densely lyrical little number with obvious Sam Shepard and Richard Maxwell influences, this two-hander is a rich and intriguing mashup of styles—detective noir, history pageant, love story—but is also, unfortunately, light on substance. Jarcho is not an untalented writer, but here she seemingly suffers from an over-infatuation with language, and one wonders how the play might have fared in the hands of a director more removed from the work. Even the downtown darlings Jenny Seastone Stern and Aaron Landsman, who both play multiple characters with their usual eerie charm and pitch-perfect timing, can't quite save the show from murkiness. (Paradise Factory, 64 E. 4th St. 212-613-3119. Through Dec. 12.)

BIOGRAPHY
Pamela Moller Kareman directs S. N. Behrman's 1932 play. (Theatre 3 at the Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 212-352-3101.)

FELA!
This musical, directed by Bill T. Jones, which opened Off Broadway last year and just reopened, at the Eugene O'Neill, tells the life story of Fela Kuti, the father of Afro-beat and, in the nineteen-seventies, one of the most popular musicians in West Africa. Like all after-stories of beloved leaders, the musical's account of Fela has notable omissions, especially regarding his religious and sexual politics. But there are two great things in this show: one is Sahr Ngaujah, the man who, for most of the week, plays Fela. How did the producers find a performer who matched Fela in charm, wit, and insolence? Ngaujah is a thrilling actor, with enough moods and tones and nuances that you have no trouble listening to him for more than two hours straight. The second glory of "Fela!" is the dancing, created by Bill T. Jones. It's hard to make West African dance look bad, but oh how good Jones and the dancers, more than half of them American-born (the others are African or Caribbean), have made it look. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/7/09.) (230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER
Rebecca Gilman wrote this play, based on the novel by Carson McCullers. Doug Hughes directs. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE LAST CARGO CULT
Mike Daisey performs his latest monologue, which examines the financial crisis through the story of a group of people living at the base of an erupting volcano in the South Pacific. Jean-Michele Gregory directs. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Through Dec. 13.)

RACE
David Mamet directs the world première of his new play. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

SO HELP ME GOD!
Mint Theatre Company presents a revival of Maurine Dallas Watkins's 1929 comedy, in which a diva actress feels threatened by her understudy. Kristen Johnston and Anna Chlumsky star; Jonathan Bank directs. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

THE STARRY MESSENGER
In its own lacklustre, long-winded way—at nearly three hours, it's proof of the peril of having a writer direct his own work—this play, written and directed by Kenneth Lonergan, is a demonstration of life's caprice, which calls Catholic assumptions into question. The modest, married, buttoned-down forty-six-year-old Mark Williams (Matthew Broderick) is trying to teach astronomy to a group of pesky students at the old Hayden Planetarium; he's stalled, and lack of momentum is a problem for both him and the play. Lonergan, of course, stage-manages a connection for the hapless teacher: a sweet-natured Puerto Rican training nurse, Angela Vasquez (the appealing Catalina Sandino Moreno), drops into his classroom to inquire about the possibility of her nine-year-old son's attending the planetarium lectures. The expert Broderick manages to make his character's timidity both charming and galling. The cast is uniformly excellent, but Lonergan can't pull together his moral argument or clinch the emotional transformations he forces on his characters. (12/7/09) (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE
Cate Blanchett stars in Tennessee Williams's play from 1947, directed by Liv Ullmann. (Reviewed in this issue.) (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

THIS
Melissa James Gibson's play, about neurotic New York thirty-somethings, is less grating than that description might suggest, and far cleverer. The best lines belong, naturally, to Alan (Glenn Fitzgerald), the self-loathing gay best friend ("I have no problem with self-involvement—except in others"), but we are meant to focus on Jane (the alluring Julianne Nicholson), a young, widowed poet who crosses the line with a married friend. The play starts out like a brooding rom-com—imagine a "Friends" episode with a Hamlet complex—

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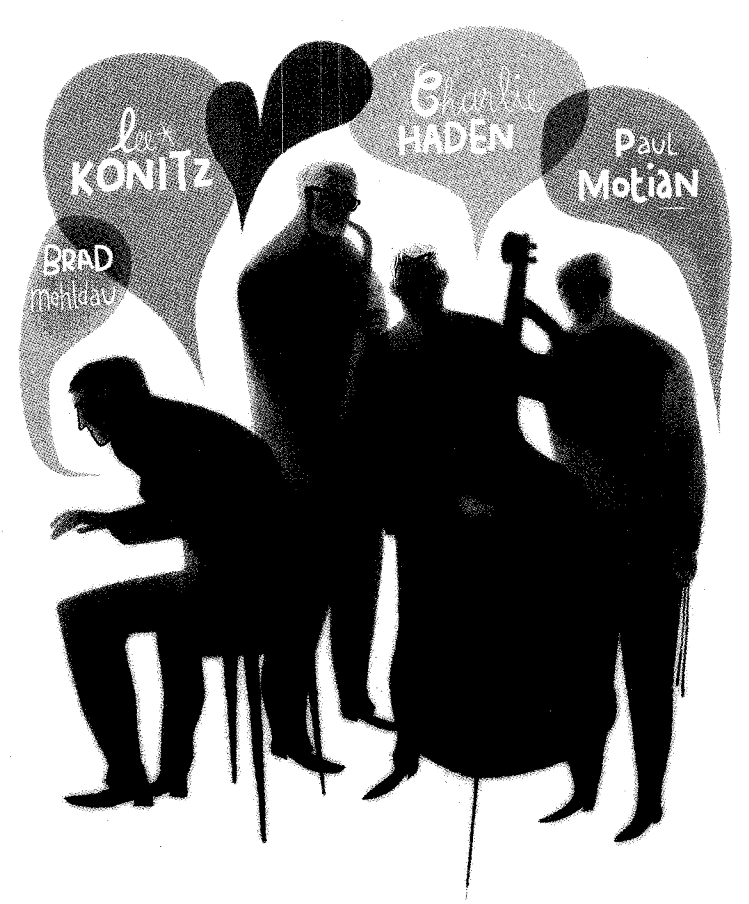
but soon grows to earn its contemplative streak. Gibson has insightful things to say about marriage, grief, and Brita filters; on these subjects and others, the play's droll wisdom feels hard-won. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Dec. 13.)

Also Playing

AVENUE Q: New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE BROTHER/SISTER PLAYS:** Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. **DREAMGIRLS:** Apollo Theatre, 253 W. 125th St. 212-307-4100. Through Dec. 12. **FINIAN'S RAINBOW:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **GOD OF CARNAGE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL:** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **IDIOT SAVANT:** Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. **IN THE NEXT ROOM OR THE VIBRATOR PLAY:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **IRVING BERLIN'S WHITE CHRISTMAS:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE LATE CHRISTOPHER BEAN:** Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Dec. 12. **LET ME DOWN EASY:** Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. **LOVE, LOSS, AND WHAT I WORE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. **MEMPHIS:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **NEXT TO NORMAL:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE: PART I:** Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-352-3101. **OUR TOWN:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444. **POST NO BILLS:** Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444. Through Dec. 13. **RAGTIME:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **THE ROYAL FAMILY:** Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. Through Dec. 13. **SUPERIOR DONUTS:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE UNDERSTUDY:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **WISHFUL DRINKING:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. **ZERO HOUR:** Theatre at St. Clements, 423 W. 46th St. 212-279-4200.



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NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

THE BELL HOUSE
149 7th St., between Second and Third Aves., Brooklyn (718-643-6510)—Dec. 12: Formed in 1984 from the ashes of the Irish pop-punk group the Undertones, **That Petrol Emotion** took their sharp, catchy aesthetic in bold new directions. After five albums of exuberant pop with a garage-rock edge, the band called it quits in the mid-nineties. But the group's demise was just a hiatus, and they have returned to active duty.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Dec. 11: The genre-defying ensemble the **Phenomenal Handclap Band.**

BROOKLYN BOWL
61 Wythe Ave., Williamsburg (718-963-3369)—Dec. 11: The trippy Philadelphia quintet **Dr. Dog** has a down-home sixties sound that knows few bounds. It's a little bit country, a little bit rock, and has tremendous pop hooks. This is a "July in Christmas" show, and rumor has it that it might include bathing suits and fake snow.

DEATH BY AUDIO
49 S. 2nd St., Brooklyn (No phone)—Dec. 12. The celebrated **Vivian Girls,** an all-girl hipster-rock trio from New Jersey. With Austin's minimalist pop duo **Yellow Fever,** which just released a self-titled album on the Girls' own label, Wild World Records. Also with **Happy Birthday.**

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Dec. 11: The **Whigs** are a youthful power-pop trio from Athens, Georgia, who play gritty guitar music in the rollicking spirit of the Replacements. The band is currently touring in preparation for the release of its third album, "In the Dark." Dec. 13: "They look like the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles on LSD" is how Joan Rivers once described the intergalactic-horror/thrash-metal band **GWAR.** The band is celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary as a monstrous comedic ensemble with its current abominable lineup featuring Oderus Urungus, Flattus Maximus, Balsac the Jaws of Death, Beefcake the Mighty, Jizmak Da Gusha, and Sleazy P. Martini, and that's not counting its esteemed cast of "slaves." With a proclivity for meat and hilariously bad puns ("Womb with a View" and "Phallus in Wonderland" come to mind), GWAR is known for spraying audiences with stage blood and goopy fluid. The band has been nominated twice for Grammy Awards (it lost to Nine Inch Nails and Metallica); its most recent release is "Lust in Space."

GALAPAGOS
16 Main St., at Water St., Brooklyn (212-868-4444)—Dec. 9: The multi-octave singer **Carol Lipnik,** whose songs have a strong carnivalesque streak, joins **Little Annie** (a vocalist who also goes by Annie Anxiety and Annie Bandez and whose career dates back to Max's Kansas City) and the free-spirited singer and accordionist **Rachelle Garniez.** Lipnik will be accompanied by the keyboardist **Dred Scott,** Annie by the pianist **Paul Wallfisch;** and they'll all be joined by a few special guests.

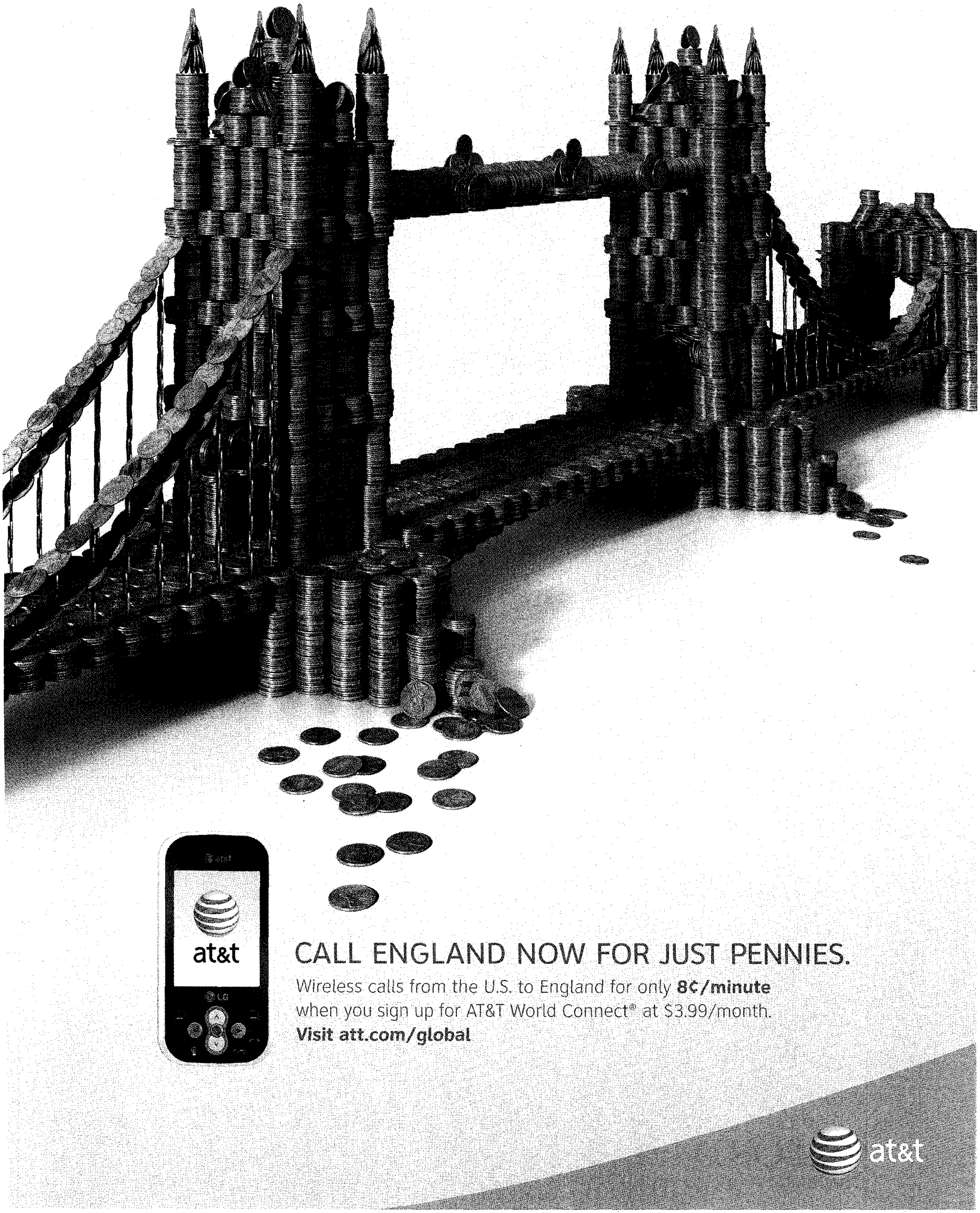
HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Dec. 11: Though billed as an alternative rock band, **Dashboard Confessional** is more of a soft-spoken one-man show, centered around the earnest singer-songwriter Christopher Carrabba. While he may look every inch the post-millennial tattooed punk rocker, Carrabba specializes in intimate music oozing the very sort of doe-eyed vulnerability that makes teen-age girls weak in the knees. While Dashboard Confessional's new album, "Alter the Ending," finds Carrabba fleshing out the arrangements with a full band, this performance will be a strictly solo acoustic affair. Dec. 14: Though coming out of the same British punk scene as the Sex Pistols and the Clash, the **Slits** had a bracingly original approach that made both of those celebrated bands sound conventional. Where their peers played as hard and as fast as their testosterone allowed, the all-female Slits took the trippy pulse of dub and reggae and infused it with amateurish takes on singing and guitar-playing (less strumming, more scraping), paving the way for countless post-punk bands. The group is currently touring behind its first studio album in twenty-eight years, "Trapped Animal."

LIVING ROOM
154 Ludlow St. (212-533-7237)—Dec. 12: The English-born troubadour Jonathan Spottiswoode, a dramatic performer and a wildly prolific songwriter, rings in the holidays with his band **Spottiswoode & His Enemies,** an agile unit that moves effortlessly through a wide range of genres, including cabaret and gospel. Dec. 14: The legendary songwriter **Chip Taylor** ("Wild Thing," "Angel of the Morning") gives his back catalogue a workout in the company of the fiddler and vocalist **Kendel Carson** and his brother, the actor **Jon Voight.** Taylor will also sing songs from his new album, "Yonkers, NY," which details his youth in Westchester with Jon, his mother, his golf-pro father, and his other brother, Barry, who is a noted volcanologist.

MAXWELL'S
1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-653-1703)—Dec. 11: The British singer-songwriter **Holly Golightly** has a pure, straight-ahead vocal style that she mostly applies to country music when performing with her current band, the **Brokeoffs,** which features her longtime collaborator Lawyer Dave on guitar. Her voice also works beautifully singing smoky lounge music, blues, grunge, and rock; she started her career in the all-girl garage band Thee Headcoatees, after all. She's here with **T-Model Ford,** one of the last juke-joint bluesmen still plying the trade. The nearly ninety-year-old Mississippi singer is quite capable of creating a mighty racket in the classic raw setting of electric guitar and drums, but he'll get the full backup treatment from the Seattle-based band **GravelRoad.**

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Dec. 10: **Holly Golighty and the Brokeoffs** (see Maxwell's). Dec. 15-16: Sample-based, soporific post-noise pop has become almost completely intolerable of late. Still, strong songwriting shines through the gauze of a lo-fi sound famous for its restrictive sonic contours. A good example is **Neon Indian,** the multimedia project of the enterprising Texas transplant Alan Palomo. He received some serious buzz at the C.M.J. festival earlier this year, and he returns from a quick European jaunt for two nights at this downtown venue.

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG
66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—Dec. 12: The local guitar phenom **Kaki King** is busy these days recording a new album, and she promises to share some of her latest material at this show. The opening act, **A Rose Parade,** is a new collaboration between Shannon Funchess and Gerard Smith (of the bands !!! and TV on the Radio, respectively).



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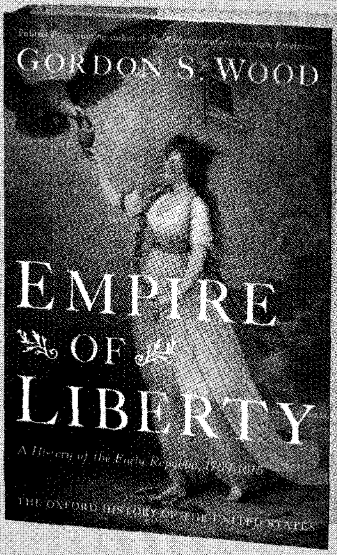
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NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (800-745-3000)—Dec. 14: The blue-eyed soul man **Robin Thicke**—the son of the "Growing Pains" star Alan Thicke—first surfaced a few years ago with a hybrid of pop and R. & B. The world didn't take notice until about 2006, however, when he hooked up with the producer Pharrell Williams, who updated his sound and bestowed credibility and chart success upon him.

SHEA STADIUM
20 Meadow St., Brooklyn (no phone)—Don't let the name fool you: this D.I.Y. space in the hinterlands of East Williamsburg has nothing to do with the old baseball stadium. It was conceived as a public recording resource, intended to document the vibrancy of local live music. Bands are paid with a professional-grade live recording of their set, produced by the venue's founder (and professional engineer) Adam Reich. The space has a broad-minded attitude toward booking, but tends to attract a talented array of up-and-comers. The show on Dec. 9 features the wistful and corroded melancholy of the drowsy popsters **Beach Fossils.** (For more information, visit www.liveatsheastadium.com.)

SULLIVAN HALL
214 Sullivan St., between Bleecker and W. 3rd Sts. (212-477-2782)—Dec. 9-10: The versatile guitarist **Wayne Krantz,** who has jazz fingers and a rock-and-roll heart, is perhaps best known for his twelve-year residency (now ended) at the 55 Bar and his side work with Steely Dan. His trio with the drummer **Keith Carlock** and the bassist **Tim Lefebvre** released their first album, "Krantz Carlock Lefebvre," in August, after more than a decade of gigging and honing their sound.

TERMINAL 5
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—Dec. 10-11: Following in the proudly louche path of predecessors like Oasis and the Libertines, the **Arctic Monkeys** shot out of Yorkshire, England, in 2006 with a bold, insistent guitar rock that demanded attention. The band's latest album, "Humbug," finds it straying slightly from its immediately catchy original sound toward a harder, darker one.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BARBÈS
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (347-422-0248)—Dec. 11: During its eighties and early-nineties heyday, the saxophone-heavy **Microscopic Septet** drew on a cache of inspired improvisers and two of the era's most sophisticated and stylistically slippery jazz composers and players—the pianist **Joel Forrester** and the saxophonist **Phillip Johnston.** This reunion promises equal parts zaniness and braininess, as heard on the band's most recent album, "Lobster Leaps In."

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Dec. 8-12: The saxophonist **Lee Konitz,** the bassist **Charlie Haden,** and the drummer **Paul Motian**—three of the most consistently adventurous jazz veterans out there—have been moving in and out of each other's musical lives for nearly half a century. The pianist **Brad Mehldau** entered their realm more recently, but he quickly found his rightful place. Interaction of a high order is virtually a given. These shows are being recorded for a live album, and they are taking place in celebration of Birdland's sixtieth anniversary. The club hasn't been open sixty straight years. It was first located on Broadway, off of 52nd Street, from 1949 to 1965, and then later reopened, in 1986, further uptown on Broadway, before moving to its present location, in 1996. Fittingly enough, though, Konitz played the club's opening night, on December 15, 1949 (admission was ninety-eight cents). The drummer **Roy Haynes** was there that night, too, holding down a beat for Charlie Parker, and he continues the celebration with his quartet, starting Dec. 15.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Dec. 9-13: Latin-infused jazz may be having a resurgence, but the pianist and bandleader **Eddie Palmieri** has been holding the banner high for more than five decades. He celebrates his seventy-third birthday with assistance from his redoubtable La Perfecta II aggregate.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Dec. 8-13: The bubbling multicultural blend of the pianist **Randy Weston's African Rhythms Sextet** gets a further rhythmic charge from the elegant drummer **Lewis Nash.**

DOUGLASS STREET MUSIC COLLECTIVE
295 Douglass St., between Third and Fourth Aves., Brooklyn (no phone)—Dec. 13: The **Claudia Quintet.** Search for anyone named Claudia in this group and disappointment will follow; better to keep an eye out for such edgy new-jazz players as the drummer **John Hollenbeck** and the saxophonist **Chris Speed.** With the organist **Gary Versace.**

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Dec. 10-12, in Rose Hall: **Wycliffe Gordon** and such New Orleans friends as **Victor Goines, Herlin Riley,** and **Don Vappie** celebrate the holidays Big Easy style. Dec. 11-12, in the Allen Room: The singer **Kim Burrell,** backed by a thirteen-piece orchestra, keeps things in a more traditional vein with "A Gospel Christmas."

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Dec. 9: The **Bill Mays** trio. "Mays at the Movies!," the new album from this exemplary mainstream pianist, is a jazz exploration of memorable film themes. He's joined by **Peter Washington,** on bass, and **Billy Drummond,** on drums. Dec. 10-13: The Argentine flavors of the pianist **Pablo Ziegler's** jazz tango ensemble mix with a taste of Puerto Rican seasoning by way of the guest saxophonists **Miguel Zenon** (Dec. 10-11) and **David Sánchez** (Dec. 12-13).

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Dec. 10-13: The cabaret star **Ute Lemper,** who never stints on decadence, drama, power, and sexuality.

ROULETTE
20 Greene St. (212-219-8242)—Dec. 11: The percussionist **Susie Ibarra** presents an evening of solo works drawn mostly from her 2007 release, "Drum Sketches." Ibarra, a Filipino-American who is widely known for her idiosyncratic and passionate improvisations, has a deep interest in Filipino percussion, especially the *kulintang*, the name of both a style and a xylophone-like instrument made up of pitched brass gongs. This concert includes two new compositions that weave together melodies played on the *sarunay* (a smaller *kulintang*) and a trap set and derived from field recordings that include a gong procession in the Philippines and a chorus of spring peepers singing in an upstate pond.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Dec. 8-13: The trumpeter **Dave Douglas** keeps his fingers in a number of musical pies at once, but among his more satisfying—and, for him, conventional—ensembles is a long-running quintet that includes such able players as the pianist **Uri Caine** and the saxophonist **Donny McCaslin.**

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Velázquez Rediscovered."** Through Feb. 7. ♦ **"The 'Young Archer,' Attributed to Michelangelo."** Ongoing. ♦ **"Art of the Samurai: Japanese Arms and Armor, 1156-1868."** Through Jan. 10. ♦ **"American Stories: Paintings of Everyday Life, 1765-1915."** Through Jan. 24. ♦ **"Looking In: Robert Frank's 'The Americans.' "** Through Jan. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity."** Through Jan. 25. ♦ **"Tim Burton."** Monet's "Water Lilies" it ain't. The director of "Batman," "Edward Scissorhands," and "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory"—who went to art school in the seventies before going to work as an animator at Disney—exhibits costumes, props and sculptures, and ephemeral oddments, such as a yellow legal pad with notes for "Beetlejuice" suggesting that the script be streamlined. The

curators might have heeded a similar note: the show weighs in at more than seven hundred objects. Most of them are drawings, including wry cartoons that show the influence of Edward Gorey, Al Hirschfeld, and *Mad* magazine. Large-scale Polaroids from the nineties reveal the filmmaker's goth leanings. Moody pop-surrealist style trumps substance at every turn. Through April 26. ♦ **"Monet's Water Lilies."** Through April 12. ♦ **"New Photography 2009: Walead Beshty, Daniel Gordon, Leslie Hewitt, Carter Mull, Sterling Ruby, Sara VanDerBeek."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Gabriel Orozco."** Opens Dec. 13. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Kandinsky."** Through Jan. 13. ♦ **"Anish Kapoor: Memory."** Through March 28. (Open Fridays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Saturday evenings until 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Roni Horn aka Roni Horn."** Through Jan. 24. ♦ **"Georgia O'Keeffe: Abstraction."** Through Jan. 17. ♦ **"Omer Fast: Nostalgia."** Opens Dec. 9. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Who Shot Rock & Roll: A Photographic History, 1955 to the Present."** Through Jan. 31. ♦ **"James Tissot: 'The Life of Christ.'"** Through Jan. 17. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Traveling the Silk Road: Ancient Pathway to the Modern World."** Through Aug. 15. ♦ **"Extreme Mammals: The Biggest, Smallest, and Most Amazing Mammals of All Time."** Through Jan. 3. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Watteau to Degas: French Drawings from the Frits Lugt Collection."** Through Jan. 10. ♦ **"Exuberant Grotesques: Renaissance Maiolica from the Fontana Workshop."** Through Jan. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Alias Man Ray: The Art of Reinvention."** This substantial exhibition reacquaints viewers with the American artist whose Surrealist paintings, rayographs (cameraless photographs), and photographic portraits—of James Joyce, Marcel Proust, and Kiki de Montparnasse, her back transformed into a cello—earned him a spot in the canon of the European avant-garde. It also introduces a lesser-known figure, one whose sculpture of suspended wooden hangers paved the way for Calder's mobiles. Most provocatively, it unmasks Man Ray as Emmanuel Radnitzky, the son of a tailor and a seamstress, who dreamed himself out of Brooklyn and into the chimerical life of an artist—a famous man who was also a figment—decades before Andy Warhol said he'd choose the word for his tombstone. Through March 14. ♦ **"Reinventing Ritual: Contemporary Art and Design for Jewish Life."** Through Feb. 7. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 5:45, Thursdays, 11 to 8, and Fridays, 11 to 4.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"A Woman's Wit: Jane Austen's Life and Legacy."** Through March 14. ♦ **"William Blake's World: 'A New Heaven Is Begun.'"** Through Jan. 3. ♦ **"Rococo and Revolution: Eighteenth-Century French Drawings."** Through Jan. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

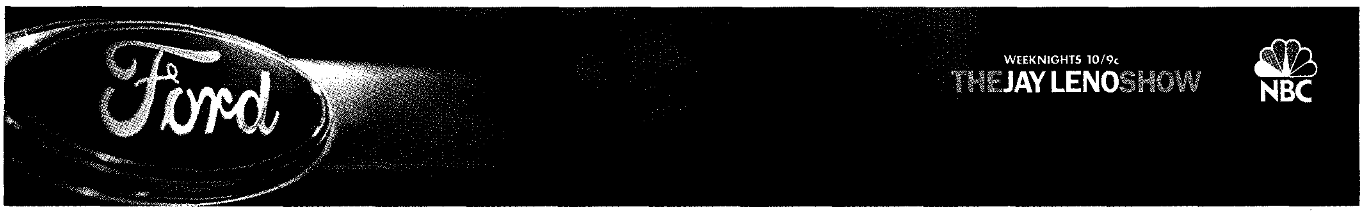
MUSEUM OF ARTS & DESIGN
2 Columbus Circle (212-299-7777)—**"Read My Pins: The Madeleine Albright Collection."** Through Jan. 31. ♦ **"Slash: Paper Under the Knife."** Through April 4. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future."** Through Jan. 31. ♦ **"Legacy: The Preservation of Wilderness in New York City."** Through March 21. ♦ **"Only in New York: Photographs from *Look* Magazine."** Through Jan. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Urs Fischer: Marguerite de Ponty."** Through Feb. 7. ♦ **"Nikhil Chopra: Yog Raj Chitrakar, Memory Drawing IX."** Through Feb. 14. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"Lincoln and New York."** Through March 25. ♦ **"John Brown: The Abolitionist and His Legacy."** Through March 25. ♦ **"Nature and the American Vision: The Hudson River School at the New-York Historical Society."** Through March 25. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (212-869-8089)—**"Mapping New York's Shoreline, 1609-2009: Celebrating the Quadricentennial of Henry Hudson's Exploration of the Waterways of New York."** Through June 26. ♦ **"Candide at 250: Scandal and Success."** Through April 25. (Open Mondays, 11 to 6, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 7:30, Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 1 to 5.)



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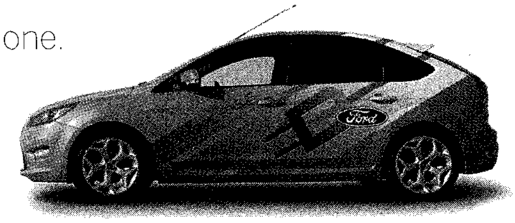

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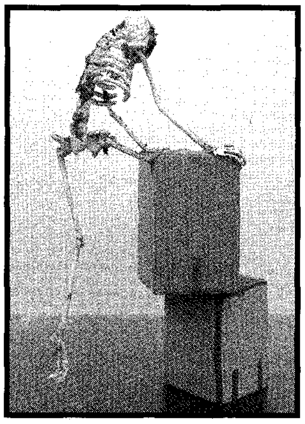
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
PUTTING ON URS

"Why must the show go on?" Noël Coward wondered. The question recurs apropos a desperately ingratiating Urs Fischer exhibition at the New Museum. Frail japes by the mildly talented Swiss-born sculptor—the international art world's chief gadfly wit since Maurizio Cattelan faded in the role—are jacked up to epic, flauntingly expensive scale. There are huge aluminum casts of tiny clay lumps (you can tell by the giant thumbprints), walls and a ceiling papered with photographs of themselves, and big mirrored blocks that bear images of common objects. When a hole in a wall is approached, a realistic tongue sticks out of it. A faux cake is suspended in the air by hidden magnets. It's all nicely diverting—but from what? If you spend more than twenty minutes with the three-floor extravaganza, you're loitering. The New Museum could just as well not have done the show while saying it did. The effect would be roughly the same: expressing a practically reptilian institutional craving for a new art star.


URS FISCHER, "VIOLENT CAPPUCCINO" (2007); PHOTOGRAPH: BENOIT PAILLEY

—*Peter Schjeldahl*

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"1969."** Through April 5. ♦ **"Between Spaces."** Through April 5. ♦ **"Robert Bergman: Selected Portraits."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"30 Seconds Off an Inch."** Through March 14. ♦ **"Wardell Milan: Drawings of Harlem."** Through March 14. ♦ **"A Delicate Touch: Watercolors from the Permanent Collection."** Through March 14. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

MUSTAFA MALUKA
According to his Twitter account, Maluka, who was born in South Africa and divides his time between Helsinki and New York, is a "bio-artist, cultural analyst, ethical hacker, global citizen, and Ph.D. dropout." According to his deadpan color paintings, he lives in a post-human world; lips are green, eyebrows are blue, and ethnic identity is moot. Yet for all his visionary posturing, Maluka's paintings are awfully conventional, more about surface effects than cultural ruptures. Through Dec. 23. (Tilton, 8 E. 76th St. 212-737-2221.)

RAY K. METZKER
A survey of photographs involving automobiles provides an ideal opportunity to study the terrific sweep and intelligence of Metzker's inventiveness. Made between 1958 and 2009, the black-and-white work often falls between representation and abstraction: cars are reduced to gleaming outlines and bulky shapes within graphic compositions. The largest and most recent pictures treat their reflective surfaces as fun-house mirrors, distorting the surrounding streetscapes. But earlier images, on a more intimate scale, are also more engaging: evidence of an eye always alert to moments when the ordinary turns sublime. Breaking with the abstract impulse are several fine photographs of people in their cars that suggest a whole other line of inquiry. Through Jan. 9. (Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-3930.)

VICTOR SKREBNESKI
Although his reputation rests primarily on sleekly stylized photographs of nudes, fashion, and celebrities from the seventies and eighties, Skrebneski has always had an arty streak. Here he pays homage to Francis Bacon with a series of massively scaled black-and-white images presented as triptychs in thick gilt frames. The work's overweening ambition is, in most cases, matched by Skrebneski's skill at capturing Bacon's charged atmosphere of agony and ecstasy. The solitary male nudes, their bodies smudged by movement, crouch or stand on loosely sketched-in stages and raised platforms, looking at once solid and ghostly. Elegant and erotic, the work, like Bacon's, appears to be teetering on the edge of pitch blackness, flirting with the void. Through Jan. 5. (Friedman & Vallois, 27 E. 67th St. 212-517-3820.)

"THE ORIGINS OF EL GRECO: ICON PAINTING IN VENETIAN CRETE"
A ravishing gathering of fifty religious paintings is really two shows in one. The first follows the blossoming of an Old Master, the painter El Greco (1541-1614), born Domenikos Theotokopoulos on the island of Crete. The second traces an East-West mashup in Greek icon painting, in which the stately flatness of the Byzantine style met the more naturalistic perspective of the Italian Renaissance, influenced by Michelangelo, Raphael, and Titian (in whose workshop El Greco is thought to have apprenticed). The show's grand finale is the oil study "The Coronation of the Virgin" (c. 1603), painted as if El Greco were gazing into a concave mirror reflecting the vault of heaven. Through Feb. 27. (Onassis Cultural Center, 645 Fifth Ave., at 51st St. 212-486-4448.)

Short List

ROGER BALLEN: Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through Dec. 23. **PHILIP GUSTON:** McKee, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-688-5951. Through Dec. 31. **RAY PARKER:** Washburn, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-6780. Through Jan. 9. **GERHARD RICHTER:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Jan. 9. **JANE WILSON:** DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-247-2111. Through Dec. 23.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

WALLACE BERMAN
A near-mythic mid-century wild man, Berman (1927-1976) blazed through the art worlds of Los Angeles and San Francisco—after his expulsion from high school for gambling—experimenting with jazz, Beat poetry, spiritualism, film, and alternatives to painting. Collages, made using a Verifax (a precursor of the Xerox photocopier), reel with positive and negative images drawn from pop culture and more mystical spheres, including Kabbalah and the tarot. The show's experimental heart is Berman's only film, "Aleph," an eight-minute-long work that took a decade to make (1956-66). It's shown here in both its original, silent version and with a new soundtrack by John Zorn, whose avant-saxophone skronk strikes just the right unruly note. Through Jan. 9. (Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335.)

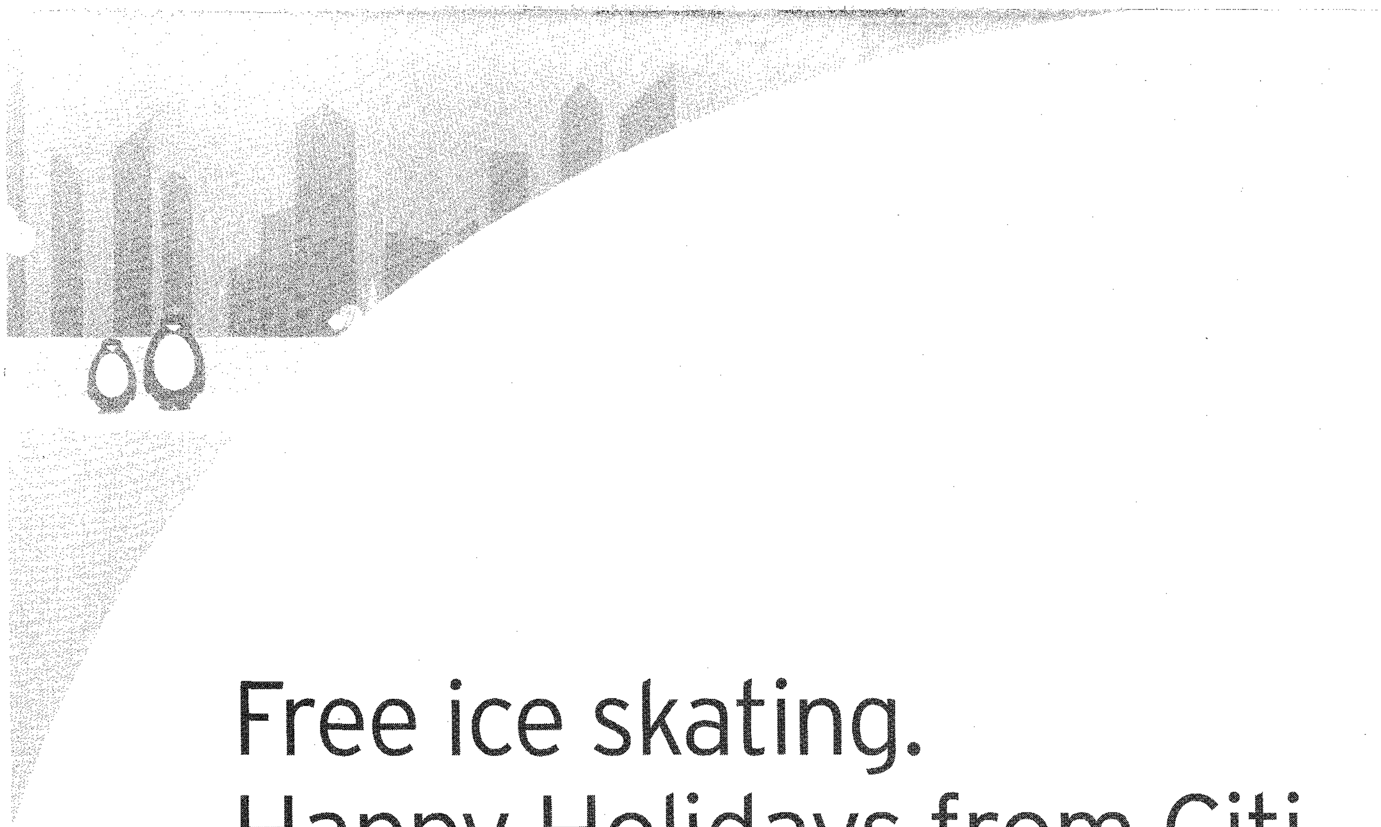
JEFF MERMELSTEIN
A New York street photographer in the rough-and-tumble tradition of Weegee, Garry Winogrand, Joel Meyerowitz, and Lee Friedlander, Mermelstein is alert to the idiosyncrasies of people in public. "Twirl / Run," as his new show and book are both titled, has, he admits, "an off-the-wallness" that takes some getting used to. Going through years of accumulated prints, he discovered an unusual number that included girls absent-mindedly twirling locks of hair and others of people (mostly men) sprinting on busy sidewalks. For this project, he's combined the two groups of pictures into a weirdly random view of urban life: aimless, hurried, distracted, driven. The impact of all the contradictory activity is best captured on a wall of small, unframed prints that achieve an invigorating, crazy-quilt density. Through Jan. 16. (RWFA, 511 W. 25th St. 917-348-8485.)

ANDREW MOORE
After his work with Cuba's crumbling architecture, Moore's large-scale photographs of Detroit in ruins are a lot less romantic but just as fascinating. The pictures are in color, but the burned-out, dilapidated state of many of these sites renders them virtually black, white, and dingy gray. In one abandoned dry dock, someone has set up shelter under plastic sheeting that falls from an upper floor like a waterfall. The shattered, hulking interiors of the Rouge, the legendary Ford factory, and two ornate movie theatres are sad reminders of grander or at least more optimistic times. But a severely modernist former Model T headquarters has given way to a surreal garden, its sodden carpeting sprouting moss in a pattern Dali might envy. Through Jan. 9. (Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.)

MATT STOKES
Punk rock, anthropology, and art collide in the British artist's New York début, a two-channel film titled "These Are the Days" that documents the underground music scene in Austin, Texas. (His past subjects include the subcultures of acid house and black metal.) On one screen, skateboarders convene a mosh pit, the kind of testosterone-fuelled dance floor where the sight of a broken arm or nose isn't uncommon. On the second, a band performs a song written after watching the raw concert footage. While the call-and-response results do distill the visceral energy of punk, Stokes's piece lacks the wide-reaching visionary audacity of its obvious antecedent, Dan Graham's "Rock My Religion." Through Dec. 19. (ZieherSmith, 516 W. 20th St. 212-229-1088.)

Short List

BRIAN CALVIN: Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Opens Dec. 10. **ROZ CHAST:** Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410. Through Jan. 9. **ROBERT COLESCOTT:** Kravets/Wehby, 521 W. 21st



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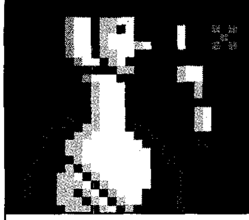

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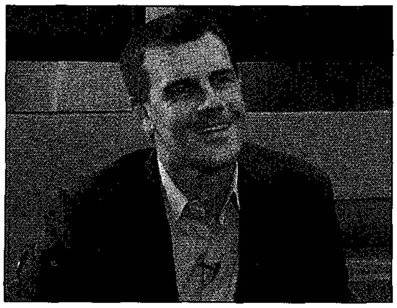

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St. 212-352-2238. Through Jan. 16. **MOYRA DAVEY:** Murray Guy, 453 W. 17th St. 212-463-7372. Through Dec. 24. **DAN FLAVIN:** Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Dec. 23. **WILLIAM J. O'BRIEN:** Boesky, 509 W. 24th St. 212-680-9889. Through Dec. 19. **NORBERT SCHWONTKOWSKI:** Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400. Through Jan. 9. **SU-MEI TSE:** Peter Blum, 526 W. 29th St. 212-244-6055. Through Jan. 9. **MARTIN WONG:** P.P.O.W, 511 W. 25th St. 212-647-1044. Opens Dec. 10. **"BESIDES, WITH, AGAINST, AND YET: ABSTRACTION AND THE READYMADE GESTURE":** The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Through Jan. 16. **"IN NUMBERS: SERIAL PUBLICATIONS BY ARTISTS SINCE 1955":** X Initiative, 548 W. 22nd St. 917-697-4886. Opens Dec. 10. **"LOOKING BACK":** White Columns, 320 W. 13th St. 212-924-4212. Through Jan. 9.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

KRYSTEN CUNNINGHAM

What this tiny Lower East Side space—billed as an office as opposed to a gallery—lacks in square footage it more than makes up for in curatorial impact, under the keen direction of Howie Chen and Gabrielle Giattino. Their latest show introduces New York to a promising young sculptor from Los Angeles whose shelf-mounted arrangements interlace low-fi haptics (felt, hand-dyed from oak bark) and high-tech theories (a digital rendering of four-dimensional space) with hints of spiritual mysteries. The healing mandalas of Emma Kunz come to mind, especially in a great big "God's Eye," woven in red, green, and blue yarn. If it seems hippy-dippy, consider the colors—the computer's R.G.B. palette. (Dispatch, 127 Henry St. 212-227-2783.)

Short List

MARCEL BROODTHAERS: Freeman, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-966-5154. Through Dec. 23. **HIROYUKI NAKAMURA:** Thierry Goldberg, 5 Rivington St. 212-967-2260. Through Dec. 20. **"ALMOST":** Beauchene, 21 Orchard St. 212-375-8043. Opens Dec. 10. **"BEGINNINGLESS THOUGHT/ENDLESS SEEING: THE WORKS OF STUART SHERMAN":** 80 WSE, 80 Washington Sq. E. 212-998-5747. Through Dec. 19. **"FROTTAGE":** Abreu, 36 Orchard St. 212-995-1774. Through Jan. 23. **"STUART SHERMAN: NOTHING UP MY SLEEVE":** Participant, Inc., 253 E. Houston St. 212-254-4334. Through Dec. 20.

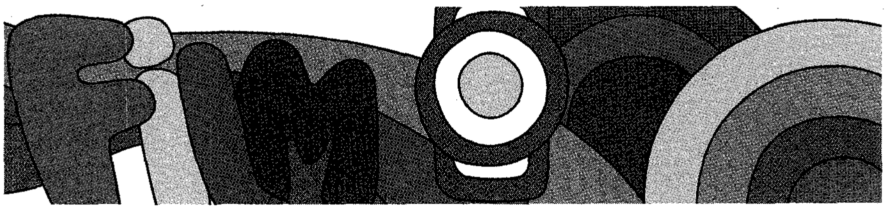
DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

Balanchine's staging of "The Nutcracker" has been entertaining and delighting children (and adults) since its première, in 1954. (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Dec. 8-10 and Dec. 15 at 6, Dec. 11 at 8, Dec. 12 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 13 at 1 and 5. Through Jan. 3.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE

This week, as Judith Jamison celebrates two decades as artistic director, she's honored with a tribute dance from the best choreographer she's sponsored, Ronald K. Brown. "Dancing Spirit" comes in his favored form, the suite, stringing together Duke Ellington, Wynton Marsalis, and War. "Best of 20 Years" is a baker's-dozen sampling of the works Jamison has commissioned or imported into the repertory, including Brown's career-making piece "Grace." The company stalwart Matthew Rushing also offers "Uptown," a costume pageant set in the Harlem Renaissance. (City Center, 131



KARI MODEN

DVD NOTES
THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

From silent comedies by Ernst Lubitsch to loud ones by the Farrelly brothers, the funniest people on the set have often been behind the camera. By giving his actors well-structured setups within which to cut loose, Judd Apatow makes most contemporary comedies feel instantly old-fashioned. In **"Funny People"** (Universal), Apatow gets to the heart of what makes them funny and why their comedic gifts set them apart.

The story is centered on George Simmons (Adam Sandler), a comedian in his forties who became rich and famous from his roles in high-concept lowbrow comedies. When he's diagnosed with a potentially fatal illness, he returns to his roots in standup; hires a struggling young performer, Ira Wright (Seth Rogen), as his factotum; and tries to win back the love of his life, Laura (Leslie Mann), who is married and has children. Though the plot has a classical symmetry, Apatow approaches it with a menacing comic fury. From the start, he shows George, Ira, and other standup artists giving vent to their agonies and insecurities regarding sex, family, sex, money, sex, and ethnicity (exemplified in Sandler's gleeful drawl of the word "Challah-caust") in routines that, despite their riotous and often juvenile ribaldry, shatter the façade of ego.

George's real pathos is due not to his illness but to his recognition that his art has left him isolated both from his peers (who are as self-centered and competitive as he is) and from civilians (including his anonymous parade of women). The much younger Ira is starting out on the same path—he steals a gig from his funnier roommate Leo (Jonah Hill) and isn't close to the sitcom stardom of his other roommate, Mark (Jason Schwartzman)—but he's also a romantic sentimentalist whose sensitive nature not only works against his comic gifts but also puts him on a collision course with the willful George, who is ready to pry Laura from her bland businessman husband, Clarke (Eric Bana).

Apatow—who is married to Mann and who cast their daughters, Iris and Maude Apatow, as Laura and Clarke's children—seems to divide himself prismatically into the hard-driven elder comedian, the young sentimentalist, and the family man; while his funny people put themselves on the line onstage and on the screen, he himself is invested, ethically and intimately, in the inner conflicts of funny people and their outer conflicts with humanity.

—*Richard Brody*

W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Dec. 8 and Dec. 15 at 7, Dec. 9-11 at 8, Dec. 12 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 13 at 3 and 7:30. Through Jan. 3.)

BALLET HISPANICO
Three programs at the Joyce include premières by Andrea Miller and Ron De Jesús. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Dec. 8-9 at 7:30, Dec. 10-11 at 8, Dec. 12 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 13 at 2 and 7:30.)

CHUNKY MOVE / "MORTAL ENGINE"
The Australian troupe's remarkable "Mortal Engine" takes place on a tilting platform that's also a projection screen for computer graphics. The light show, a retro collection of flickering lines and green lasers, is dull when left to itself. It's the interaction with the dancers who trigger it that's extraordinary—the light magically haloing their shifting shapes, the shadows swarming, tracking heat traces, swallowing bodies in black holes. Through the effects buds a theme, more repeated than developed, of men and women collapsing into each other and squirming free, of touch as something necessary and dangerous. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Dec. 9-12 at 7:30.)

"WORKS & PROCESS" / "PETER & THE WOLF"
Prokofiev's wonderful story, about a boy who disobeys his grandfather and ventures into the meadow outside his gate, only to find himself face to face with a hungry wolf, has become an annual holiday event at the Guggenheim. The score is performed by the Juilliard Ensemble, the narration is by Isaac Mizrahi, and this year the New Orleans-based art collective YA/YA has created a series of sculptures representing Prokofiev's charming characters. (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. Dec. 10-14 at 4 and 5:30.)

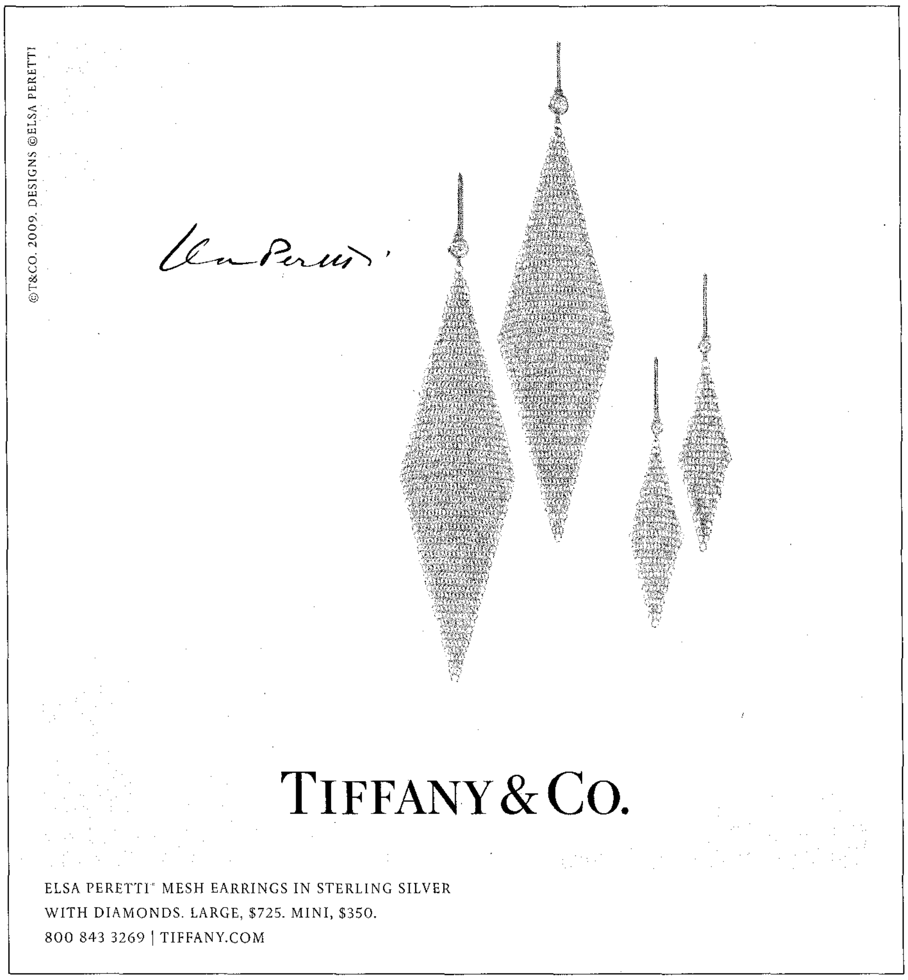
"REPLICA"
Daniel Arsham's set is the convex corner of a large cube. Onstage, he gouges holes out of the two sides which are big enough for the dancer-choreographers Jonah Bokaer and Judith Sánchez-Ruíz to crawl through and dance. The sides also serve as screens for video of the same events, allowing for an eerie merging of recorded and live, past and present, as if the holes were neurological, metaphysical. The choreography is no less sophisticated: dancers of surpassingly elegant precision suggesting signal glitches through rhythm and flashes of tenderness through mutual support. (New Museum, 235 Bowery, at Prince St. 212-219-1222. Dec. 10-11 at 7. Through Dec. 18.)

"YORKVILLE NUTCRACKER"
Dances Patrelle offers its version of "The Nutcracker," created by Francis Patrelle, which is set in New York circa 1895. (Kaye Playhouse, Park Ave. at 68th St. 212-722-4448. Dec. 10-11 at 7, Dec. 12 at 2 and 7, and Dec. 13 at noon and 5.)

"FRÄULEIN MARIA" / "NUT/CRACKED"
Doug Elkins's "Fräulein Maria" is an affectionate, tongue-in-cheek homage to the Rodgers and Hammerstein classic "Sound of Music," filled with sly references to modern-dance lore. David Parker's "Nut/Cracked" is a Tchaikovsky-inspired vaudevillian romp that includes tapping on bubble wrap and a sendup of the convoluted antics of ballet partnering. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. "Fräulein Maria": Dec. 10-12 at 7:30. "Nut/Cracked": Dec. 13 at 2. Through Dec. 20.)

AYNSLEY VANDENBROUCKE MOVEMENT GROUP
"A Number of Small Black and White Dances" confines itself to material already introduced in the past eight years of Vandenbroucke's work. The approach is similar to that of a Cunningham Event, except that props from previous productions (paper boxes, flashlights) aren't eschewed. Certain preoccupations emerge, notably near-miss physical and emotional connections, and a subtle score by Mike Rugnetta helps to bind the elements together and make them new. (Dance New Amsterdam, 280 Broadway, at Chambers St. 212-625-8369. Dec. 10-12 at 8 and Dec. 13 at 3.)

NETTA YERUSHALMY
In "Rooms Without a View," the American choreographer, who was raised in Israel, resurrects a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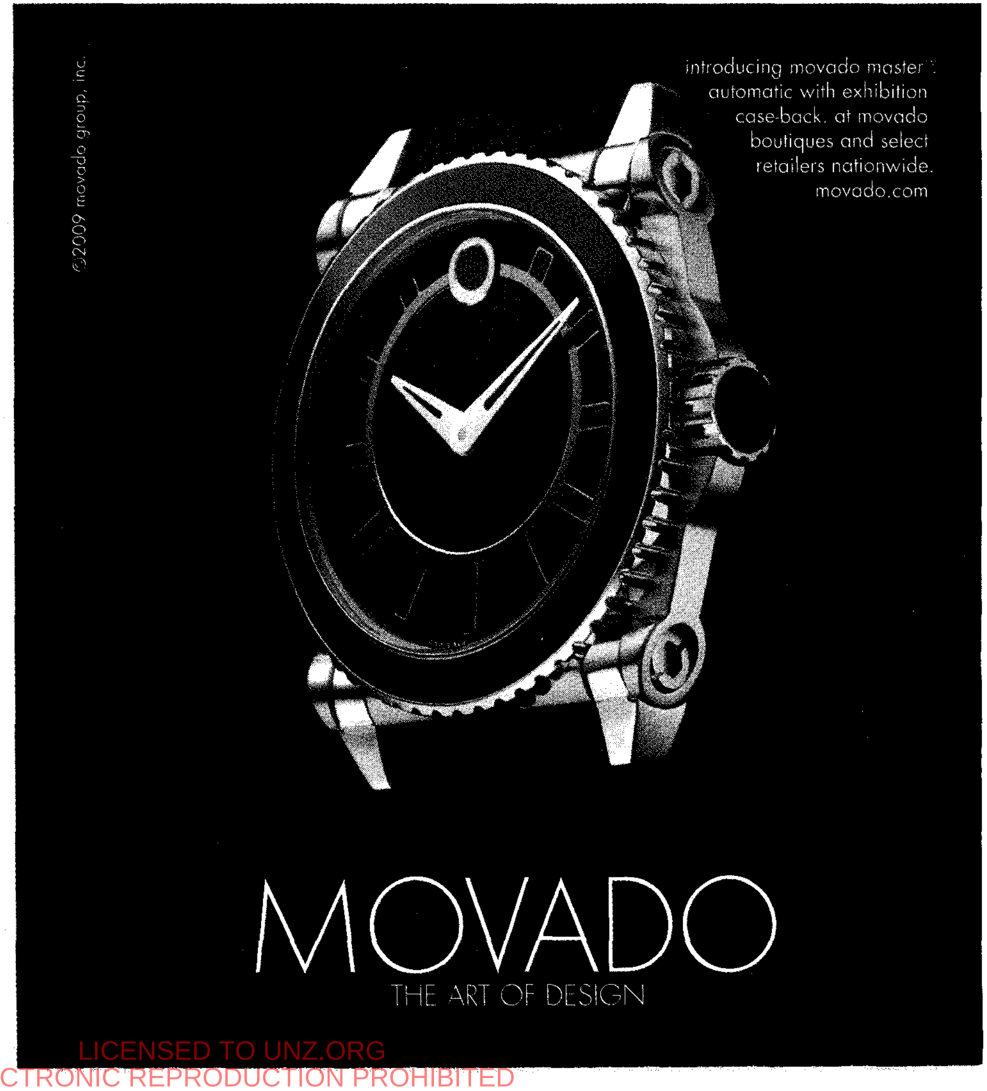
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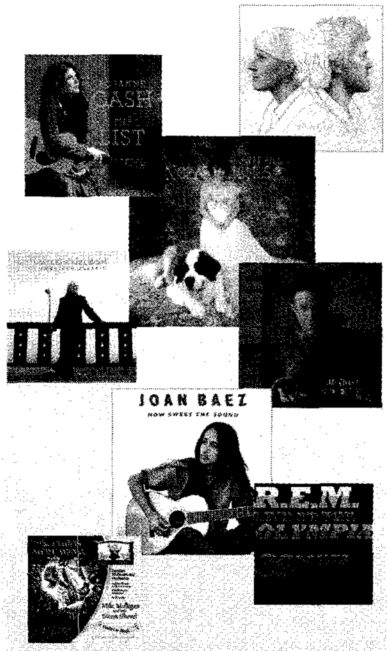

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concept much like that of "Rooms," Anna Sokolow's 1955 study of the alienated, side-by-side lives of apartment dwellers. The audience takes the viewpoint of Jimmy Stewart in "Rear Window," privy to all the contiguous dramas and free to draw connections. The violence, however, erupts in another work, "Come Closer Please," a similarly voyeuristic duet in which Yerushalmy connects with Toni Melaas in a grappling contest for domination. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Dec. 10-12 at 8.)

JUILLIARD DANCE / "NEW DANCES"
This year, the graduating class, twenty in all, got to work with the young but increasingly high-profile Canadian choreographer Aszure Barton; the class below them with the witty and imaginative Larry Keigwin. Fabien Prioville (formerly of Pina Bausch's troupe) created a theatrical work inspired by a classic Italian film (Ettore Scola's "Le Bal") for the second years, and Andrea Miller, an alumna both of Juilliard and of Ohad Naharin's Batsheva Dance, took on the youngest pupils. (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. 212-769-7406. Dec. 10-12 at 8 and Dec. 13 at 3.)

"DANCE AND PROCESS"
Yasuko Yokoshi curates this edition of the Kitchen's emerging-choreographer series, the culmination of a two-month process of structured feedback. Renée Archibald sends a large cast (including Luke Miller and Christopher Williams) into an absurd dreamscape. Neal Beasley creates lives of quiet desperation for himself, Michelle Boulé, and Beth Gill. And Steven Reker poses a conversation between his experiences in dance and in his new band, People Get Ready. (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Dec. 11-12 at 8.)

"WOMEN IN DANCE AT THE 92ND STREET Y"
This week, the Y salutes three pioneering women in modern dance with a marathon of short works. Friday, devoted to Anna Sokolow, features dances by Janis Brenner, Heidi Latsky, and Jody Oberfelder. Saturday, in honor of the less-known Amy Sue Rosen, Risa Jaroslow, Andrea Miller, and Neta Pulvermacher will perform. Sunday, Pearl Lang, a powerful interpreter of Martha Graham's works, who died earlier this year, will be honored by Carolyn Dorfman, Aviva Geismar, and Netta Yerushalmy, among others. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Dec. 11 at 8 and Dec. 12-13 at 3.)

NEW YORK THEATRE BALLET / "THE NUTCRACKER"
New York Theatre Ballet's tasteful and quick staging—only an hour long!—celebrates its twenty-fifth season. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-307-4100. Dec. 12-13 at 11 A.M., 1, and 3:30. Through Dec. 20.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
HOLIDAY MUSIC

"MESSIAH"
Handel's grand "entertainment" on Christian themes gets a great workout in Gotham this year. Carnegie Hall offers what should be a sterling performance of the work by the renowned Les Violons du Roy ensemble (with the choir La Chapelle de Québec), conducted by the lyrically inspired Bernard Labadie, with the countertenor David Daniels as a featured soloist. (212-247-7800. Dec. 11 at 8.) ♦ Downtowners should consider the performances offered by Trinity Church, the grand Episcopalian pile in the Financial District; its fine professional choir (with the Trinity Baroque Orchestra) is conducted by a distinguished guest, Jane Glover. (Broadway at Wall St. 212-866-0468. Dec. 13 at 3 and Dec. 14 at 7:30.) ♦ Kent Tritle, the esteemed conductor of the Choir of St. Ignatius Loyola, also conducts a fine avocational group, the Oratorio Society of New York; the soloists for its single Carnegie Hall performance include the soprano Susanna Phillips and the tenor Paul Appleby. (212-247-7800. Dec. 14 at 8.)

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
CLAP HANDS

A few years ago, the producers Daniel Collás and Sean Marquand were working with other musicians, like the New York salsa legend Joe Bataan, when they decided to start something from the ground up. The result is the Phenomenal Handclap Band, and you'll need both hands to count all the personnel, which sometimes includes members of the Dap-Kings and TV on the Radio. What makes this collective appealing is its disregard for genre, which is no longer a new strategy, though this bunch reaches its own spacey conclusions. Collás and Marquand are both d.j.s with a taste for psychedelic disco and rock, and this makes their outfit feel more like a commune than an army. Songs drift from Miami disco into Brazilian soul into early New York rap, much like a friendly night at a bar with a guy flipping through his favorite records. The relaxed feel masks a lot of work—you can't just invite your ten best friends down to the pub and hope they make sense of decades of music history. The band plays at the Bowery Ballroom Dec. 11.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

DANIELA SCHÜTT POZZO

WAVERLY CONSORT: "THE CHRISTMAS STORY"
Michael Jaffee's veteran ensemble traces its heritage back to the mid-nineteen-sixties, the early days of New York's early-music movement. Its holiday presentation brings the Nativity story to life by way of vocal and instrumental music from Medieval England, France, Italy, and Spain. (The Cloisters, Fort Tryon Park. 212-650-2290. Dec. 12-13 at 1 and 3.)

THE WESTERN WIND: "HOLIDAY LIGHT"
The longtime vocal group presents its annual holiday concert, an ecumenical offering of songs and carols celebrating Christmas, Hannukah, and the winter solstice, at the intimate space of the Church of St. Luke in the Fields. (487 Hudson St. 212-873-2848. Dec. 12 at 8.)

THE BRANDENBURG CONCERTOS
Bach's six concertos, the bedrock of the chamber-orchestra repertoire, have long been Christmastime favorites. Engaging performances are always provided by the musicians of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, who, back home at Alice Tully Hall, present two complete cycles. The performers include the violinists Ani Kavafian and Erin Keefe, the flutists Paula Robison and Ransom Wilson, and the cellists David Finckel and Fred Sherry. (212-875-5788. Dec. 13 at 5 and Dec. 15 at 7:30.)

JOHN ADAMS'S "EL NIÑO"
In a welcome nod to a contemporary master, Carnegie Hall has engaged the composer to conduct the Orchestra of St. Luke's in his moving, multilingual, and very modern take on the Nativity story. His first-class collaborators include the singers Dawn Upshaw, Michelle DeYoung, and Eric Owens, along with the Westminster Symphonic Choir and the Brooklyn Youth Chorus. (212-247-7800. Dec. 13 at 8.)

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Salvatore Licitra adds his voice to a revival of Jack O'Brien's winning production of Puccini's **"Il Trittico,"** which also features Patricia Racette, Heidi Grant Murphy, Stephanie Blythe, and Alessandro Corbelli in the leading roles; Stefano Ranzani conducts. (Dec. 9 at 8 and Dec. 12 at 12:30. These are the final performances.) ♦ The big news in the revival of Otto Schenk's production of **"Elektra"** is the Met début (in the title role) of the distinguished English soprano Susan Bullock, who has specialized in the heroines of Strauss and Wagner across Europe. The cast also features Deborah Voigt (in her signature role of Chrysothemis), Felicity Palmer, Wolfgang Schmidt, and Evgeny Nikitin; the excellent Fabio Luisi takes charge of the orchestra. (Dec. 10 and Dec. 15 at 8.) ♦ James Levine is scheduled to conduct the first performances of a new production of Offenbach's **"Les Contes d'Hoffmann"** by Bartlett Sher, whose recent staging of "The Barber of Seville" has proved to be a house favorite. Joseph Calleja takes the title role; Kate Lindsey sings the part of Nicklausse; Anna Netrebko, Kathleen Kim, and Ekaterina Gubanova are the soprano leads; and Alan Held portrays the four villains. (Dec. 11 at 8.) ♦ Jonathan Miller's enduring production of **"Le Nozze di Figaro"** features a vibrant young cast that includes Annette Dasch, Danielle de Niese, Isabel Leonard, Ludovic Tézier, and Luca Pisaroni in the leading roles; Luisi. (Dec. 12 at 8:30. This is the final performance.) ♦ When Richard Jones's startling new production of **"Hansel and Gretel"** (sung in English) first went up, in 2007, the veteran English tenor Philip Langridge stole the show in the role of the Witch, offering crystalline diction even while stuffing his mouth with cookie batter. He'll have two formidable colleagues, though, in Angelika Kirchschlager and Miah Persson, who take the title roles; Luisi. (Dec. 14 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC OPERA THEATRE: "PÉNÉLOPE"
The school takes a commendable risk by offering the only opera by Gabriel Fauré, who clothed the story of the return of Ulysses in his uniquely silken style. Laurent Pillot conducts the student cast and orchestra. (Borden Auditorium, Broadway at 122nd St. 917-493-4428. Dec. 9 and Dec. 11 at 7:30 and Dec. 12 at 2:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
The orchestra explores the core German repertory under the authoritative leadership of Christoph von Dohnányi, who conducts Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante in E-Flat Major (with the group's concertmaster, Glenn Dicterow, and principal violist, Cynthia Phelps) and Bruckner's Symphony No. 4 ("Romantic"). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Dec. 10 at 7:30 and Dec. 11-12 at 8.)

THE TALLIS SCHOLARS
Miller Theatre's schedule is never complete without a visit from Peter Phillips's renowned chamber choir, which devotes its next concert to Josquin's "Mass for the Virgin Mary"; the venue, appropriately, is the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, near Times Square. (145 W. 46th St. 212-854-7799. Dec. 12 at 8.)

ISRAEL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
Pinchas Zukerman, a favorite son, conducts the famed ensemble in music by Haydn (including the Symphony No. 83, "The Hen"), Bruch, and Tchaikovsky ("Romeo and Juliet"); Zukerman and his wife, Amanda Forsyth, are featured soloists on violin and cello, respectively. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. Dec. 14 at 8.)

RECITALS

"ONE EVENING" ("WINTERREISE")
Schubert's grimly moving song cycle (in English translation) is at the center of this performance by the tenor Mark Padmore and the pianist Andrew West, a multimedia theatrical event directed by Katie Mitchell that surrounds Schubert's music with texts by Samuel Beckett. (Gerald W. Lynch Theatre, John Jay College, Tenth Ave. at 58th St. 212-721-6500. Dec. 9-11 at 8.)

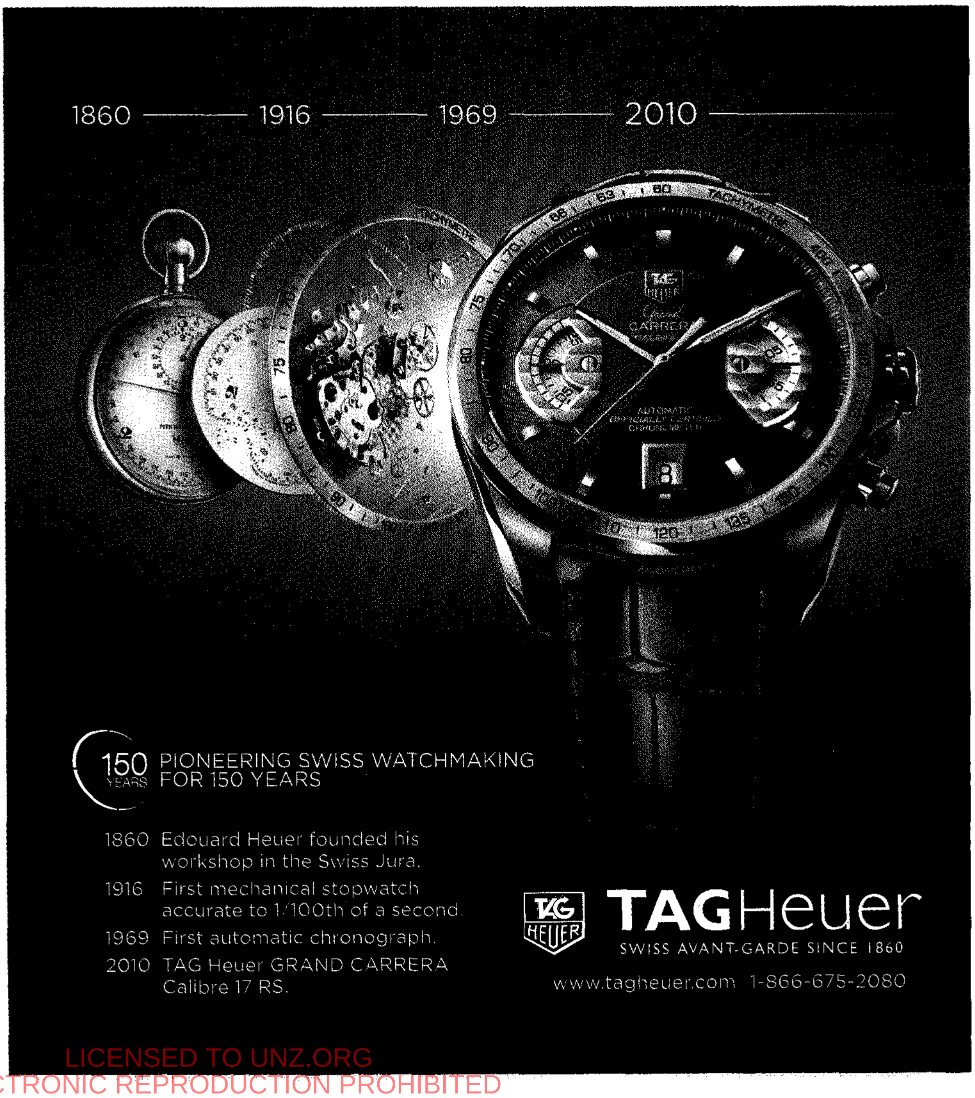
AXIOM: MUSIC BY JOHN ADAMS
Jeffrey Milarsky leads Juilliard's contemporary-music ensemble in three works by the American master (including "Six Songs by Charles Ives" and the Chamber Symphony); in addition, the Attacca Quartet performs the String Quartet, a work written last year. (Alice Tully Hall. Dec. 10 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406.) ♦ The Adams-fest continues at (Le) Poisson Rouge, which presents the ensemble in a concert mixing three Adams works (including "Road Movies") with Steve Reich's "Music for Pieces of Wood." (158 Bleecker St. www.lprnyc.com. Dec. 12 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC
Dec. 11 at 8: Blair McMillen, one of the city's most invaluable pianists, offers a glorious landmark work of American experimental music, Cage's "Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano." ♦ Dec. 12 at 8 and Dec. 13 at 3: Nathaniel Rosen performs a two-concert survey of Bach's Six Suites for Cello Solo. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN
Intellectual insight and virtuoso razzle-dazzle merge in the performances of this stupendous Canadian pianist, who comes to the 92nd Street Y to offer music by Haydn, Liszt (the Sonata in B Minor), Fauré, and Schumann (the Fantasy in C Major). (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Dec. 12 at 8.)

GLASS CHAMBER PLAYERS
A new string ensemble—staffed by such luminaries as the violinists Maria Bachmann and Tim Fain and the cellist Wendy Sutter—offers a program of substance: the sextets of Schoenberg ("Verklärte Nacht") and Philip Glass (a New York première). (Baryshnikov Arts Center, 450 W. 37th St. 212-868-4444. Dec. 12 at 8 and Dec. 13 at 5.)

AUGUSTIN HADELICH
The superb young German violinist offers a piquant program of sonatas by Beethoven (No. 8 in G Major), Schnittke, Ysaÿe, and Prokofiev (No. 2 in D Major),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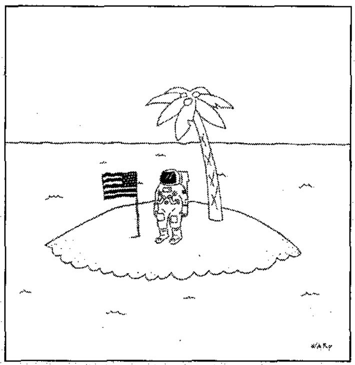

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as well as Sarasate's "Carmen Fantasy." (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 212-547-0715. Dec. 13 at 5.)

MOVIES
OPENING

INVICTUS
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Dec. 11. (In wide release.)

THE LOVELY BONES
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 11. (In wide release.)

NINE
A musical version of "8½," directed by Rob Marshall, about a movie director's personal and professional crises. Starring Daniel Day-Lewis and Kate Hudson. Opening Dec. 11. (In wide release.)

A SINGLE MAN
Tom Ford directed this drama, based on a novel by Christopher Isherwood, about a professor (Colin Firth) who, after the death of his partner (Matthew Goode), is consoled by a friend (Julianne Moore). Opening Dec. 11. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

AMARILLY OF CLOTHES-LINE ALLEY
Pure panache. Mary Pickford has a robust, unaffected gaiety as Amarilly Jenkins, an Irish-American cigarette gal who plans to marry a bartender (William Scott) until a member of the swank set (Norman Kerry) starts to woo her and his do-gooding yet snobbish aunt tries to make her over. Pickford is irresistible, but she isn't the whole show. Frances Marion's script and Marshall Neilan's direction have a seductive grace and balance. After the heroine's family upsets a high-society tea, comic pathos turns into hilarity back at the tenement, where Amarilly's brothers spoof the posh routines. The only jarring note comes with a melodramatic turn near the end, which seems designed to get Amarilly's true love out of the bar and into a job at City Hall. Released in 1918. Silent.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; Dec. 11-13.)

BAD LIEUTENANT: PORT OF CALL NEW ORLEANS
Snakes, in their sinister side-to-side way, swim through floodwaters, menacing a man held in an underground jail; alligators climb onto the freeway, causing automobiles to smash into one another; iguanas lounge on coffee tables, turning their loathsome eyes on the humans standing around them. In brief, Werner Herzog has checked into New Orleans and metaphysical despair is loosed upon Bourbon Street. It's a police procedural, sort of. A local drug kingpin is killing African-born interlopers in the white-powder trade; Detective Terence McDonagh (Nicolas Cage) tries to stop him while grabbing as much cocaine for himself as he can. Cage, his face screwed up with rage, one shoulder hitched higher than the other from a back injury, looks like Quasimodo without a bell rope to hang on to. Herzog has no interest in telling a story straight, and he lets his star run wild. The result is a mess, but it's far from boring. With Eva Mendes and Val Kilmer, who seem to be in another picture. Loosely based on Abel Ferrara's "Bad Lieutenant," from 1992, which Herzog denies ever having seen.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/30/09.) (In wide release.)

THE BLIND SIDE
The director and screenwriter John Lee Hancock's adaptation of Michael Lewis's nonfiction book is a multimillion-dollar cheeseburger—hard to resist, savory, comforting, and fundamentally unwholesome. The story, which takes place in Memphis, Tennessee, concerns the transformation of Michael Oher, a black teen-ager whose mother was a crack addict, from a street kid to an All-American college football player, thanks to the intervention of the wealthy white Tuohy family. Sandra Bullock gleefully tears into the role of Leigh Anne Tuohy, the fierce, salty, flamboyant young matriarch who takes Michael into her home and her family and becomes both his protector and his mentor, and Quintin Aaron brings a calm grace to the role of Michael. The movie is done with crispness, vigor, down-home humor, and an over-all tang of good feeling, but the pushing of buttons is extraordinarily calculated. Hancock's extremely selective view of Southern life offers a vision of anti-racism devoid of liberalism and presents young Michael as a living tabula rasa on which to project Tuohy-family values.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

BROKEN EMBRACES
The new Pedro Almodóvar film is a complicated business, with stories built inside one another and subplots leading off in furtive directions, like tunnels. We meet Harry Caine (Lluís Homar), a blind screenwriter and former director, who, when he is not undressing strangers in his apartment, is concocting screenplays with his assistant, Diego (Tamar Novas), or revisiting and recutting a movie that was taken out of his hands many years before. Much of the action is set in that time—the chronicle of a love affair between the director and his star (Penélope Cruz), the mistress of a jealous financier (José Luis Gómez). The two periods intersect, as so often in Almodóvar, via parents and children; Diego's mother and the financier's pushy son, it turns out, both have a substantial role to play. The clarity and sheen of the film are typically startling, and no living director is more expert in the weaving of matching details; this time, however, the lusts and disappointments of the characters come close to being smothered—and rendered strangely unmoving—by the surfeit of cleverness and cool. In Spanish.—*Anthony Lane* (11/23/09) (In wide release.)

FANTASTIC MR. FOX
For his stop-motion adaptation of Roald Dahl's book—about a fox who steals from three grotesque farmers, who go to absurd lengths to capture him as he leads his family and friends on increasingly desperate adventures in order to survive—the director Wes Anderson, co-writing the script with Noah Baumbach, greatly amplified the story and its emotional spectrum. Mr. and Mrs. Fox (voiced by George Clooney and Meryl Streep)—he's a journalist, she's an artist—bring to life a view of marriage that's as bittersweet and insightful as that of any recent live-action movie, and their idiosyncratic son (Jason Schwartzman) is set up in a touching rivalry with his cousin (Eric Anderson, the director's brother). Visually, the movie is a wonder, with its profusion of detail and exquisitely focussed "performances" by the figurines, whom Anderson frames in images as precisely composed as those featuring actors in his live-action work. The voice performances are sparkling and apt; the adventure plot is realized with a scenographic splendor that's as understated as it is dazzling, and is also invested with a surprising moral weight. Though the emotional realms—and the philosophical twists—that Anderson evokes are unusually sophisticated for a children's film, its exuberance is a universal tonic.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

A GORGEOUS GIRL LIKE ME
The title character of this bumptious erotic comedy, from 1972, is the wildest of François Truffaut's wild children—an abused young girl who quickly learns an amoral repertoire of survival tactics that lead her to a life of crime. Jailed on murder charges, Camille (Bernadette Lafont) is visited by a sociologist (André Dussollier, in his first movie performance) doing research for his book on women criminals and tries to catch him in her seductive web. Truffaut plays up the story's ambiguities through a dazzling multitude of styles and allusions, including an elaborate film-noir flashback structure, a series of references to "Vertigo" (including a brilliant bell-tower sequence), a Hawksian setup of a scientist loosening up, and a batch of unstrung performances à la Jerry Lewis. The picaresque adventure involves a sleazy lounge singer (Guy Marchand), an exterminator and forty-year-old virgin (Charles Denner), a predatory lawyer (Claude Brasseur), and a wet noodle of a husband (Philippe Léotard), who are all part of Truffaut's gallery of dubious masculinity ripe for the plucking. Lafont's exuberant embodiment of gleeful feminine ferocity cuts cleverly against Truffaut's grim vision of a world that both represses and craves it, and the antic comedy serves as a mask for the endless round of victimhood.—*R.B.* (French Institute Alliance Française; Dec. 15.)

INVICTUS
Clint Eastwood's stirring tribute to Nelson Mandela's moral grandeur and practical wisdom carries a whiff of the official—but the importance of such virtuous public spectacles is itself the subject of the movie. The drama concerns Mandela's embrace, in 1995—soon after his election as South Africa's first post-apartheid President—of the country's rugby team (generally loved by whites and hated by blacks) when the country hosted the sport's World Cup tournament. Morgan Freeman brings a sublime dignity and self-mastery to the role of Mandela. As Francois Pienaar, the team captain to whom Mandela reaches out, Matt Damon lends good-humored smarts to the athlete's quiet rise to enlightenment. Eastwood's view of South Africa is sketchy but warmhearted and filled with fine-grained details. We mostly see Mandela at work, exerting power gracefully and compassionately, and there are no intimate revelations and no ambiguities or ironies. Rather, the movie takes its place in Eastwood's rigorous series of latter-day reflections on democratic values—here, the republic rests on the shoulders of a virtuous leader who understands the power of political symbolism and senses that a country unites not around its ideas but around its images. As such, it's also a defense of his own popular artistry—and of the system that sustains it.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

ME AND ORSON WELLES
A vivid view of Orson Welles (Christian McKay) at twenty-two, as seen through the eyes of a cocky teenager (Zac Efron) from New Jersey who bluffs his way into Welles's Mercury Theatre group in 1937. The plot is conventional: the young man gets initiated into sex and the many other fascinating and complicated rights of the grownup world—that is, he gets warmed up and then burned by people more experienced and ruthless than he is. But the details of the production that Welles stages (a modern-dress "Julius Caesar") are fascinating, and at the center of it stands the seductive and bombastic young genius, who applies his superlative theatrical instincts to an old classic. The British actor McKay has the necessary stature and vaunting authority, an easy way with a cigar, a sly smile, and a strong voice. "I am Orson Welles!" he thunders, when challenged. "I own the store." The picture has great spirit and considerable charm. It's about the giddiness of promise—the awakening of young talents to a moment when anything seems possible. With Claire Danes as Welles's friendly but opportunistic secretary. Directed by Richard Linklater.—*D.D.* (11/30/09) (In wide release.)

THE MESSENGER
Captain Tony Stone (Woody Harrelson), an Army lifer with a shaved head and a jaw like a stone jetty, and Staff Sergeant Will Montgomery (Ben Foster), a coiled, secretive Iraq-war hero, work together at what is surely the worst job in the armed forces: telling parents and spouses that a loved one has been killed in Iraq. There's an excruciatingly obvious but unavoidable irony here: the movie itself has taken on the unwelcome task of telling its audience what it doesn't want to hear—news of the way families get hit by an unending war. Yet it doesn't feel dutiful or solemn. This is a fully felt, morally alert, marvellously acted piece of work. Harrelson, with his eye-popping glare and acetylene voice, takes his usual wild-man character deep into melancholy and loneliness; the mesmerizing Foster, whose eyes seem to look inward and outward at the same time, eases the tense, guilty war hero back into life. The two form an uneasy, carousing friendship. The visits to the families are done with great delicacy, but great courage, too, and after a while we feel not like voyeurs but like participants. With a droopy, passive Samantha Morton—the movie's only weakness—as a widow whom the sergeant falls in love with. The director, Oren Moverman (a veteran of the Israeli Army), is clearly a whiz with actors.—*D.D.* (11/16/09) (In wide release.)

NINJA ASSASSIN
The Wachowski brothers and their directing protégé James McTeigue (who worked together on "V for Vendetta") are back with this terrible blood-soaked film starring the Korean pop star Rain. There's almost no story here (despite the presence of the screenwriter of "Changeling," J. Michael Straczynski), but, rather, some incomprehensible infighting among assassins (a band of whom are out to get Rain) delivered in an editing nightmare of quick cuts, punchy sound effects, and dim lighting. There's no artistry to the fight scenes; they're just numbing, anything-goes killing sprees that, for all their limb-hacking, are about as exciting as a visit to the butcher shop.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

PRECIOUS: BASED ON THE NOVEL "PUSH" BY SAPPHIRE
How you respond to Lee Daniels's film is likely to depend on two variables: first, to what extent the preposterous title will get your tongue in a twist, and, second, whether or not you object to having extreme domestic abuse waved in front of your face. Gabourey Sidibe plays an obese, unhappy Harlem teen-ager named Clareece Jones; the task of the movie is to turn her nickname, Precious, from a wretched irony to a cause for pride—to surround her with people who will treasure her as she deserves. At the start, this seems a distant dream, since Precious is pregnant with her second child (by her own father) and trapped at home with her monster of a mother (Mo'Nique)—a withering portrait of indolence and wrath. (Might conservatives latch on to the film as a cautionary tale about an obsessive reliance on welfare? If so, that hardly seems to be what Daniels intended.) Precious finds hope in an alternative-school program, where she meets the beautiful and saintly—not to say implausible—figure of Blu Rain (Paula Patton). The tonal blend of damp-eyed fantasy and gruelling, closeup brutish-

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ness is at once morally suspect and highly effective in its manipulations; what rescues the story from the brink of the gothic is the poise and purpose of its leading performers—including Mariah Carey, no less, who is almost unrecognizable in her role as a social worker.—*A.L.* (11/9/09) (In wide release.)

THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG

Disney's first classically animated African-American heroine (voiced by Anika Noni Rose) gets short shrift in this new twist on an old tale, in which a young girl in Louisiana bayou country kisses a frog that was once a prince, and turns into a frog herself. The nineteen-twenties jazz-age setting and the primal-adventure storytelling are boilerplate Disney, scrubbed clean of any real local color. But there is a fine, zydeco-flavored score by Randy Newman and a marvellous musical sequence involving an evil voodoo doctor (voiced by Keith David), whose oozingly explosive and kaleidoscopic musical number walks away with the film.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

RED CLIFF

The action master John Woo, after years of directing (mostly middling) American films, returns to China for this epic story of a legendary third-century battle between a powerful emperor-backed general and two competing warlords. For its American release, Woo cut in half what was originally a two-part, five-hour film, and there's not a wasted minute. Gorgeously shot (by Lu Yue and Zhang Li) and beautifully acted (by Tony Leung, Zhang Fengyi, and Chiling Lin, among others), the film spreads Kurosawa-like swordplay onto a David Lean canvas and comes away with startlingly imaginative battle scenes (including one in which thousands of white-shafted arrows are fired at a barge, turning it into a floating flower arrangement). The plot, with its unusual battle plans and political intrigues, may not always be easy to follow, but Woo delivers supremely entertaining warfare.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

THE ROAD

It's hard to say how Cormac McCarthy's celebrated novel should have been done as a movie—or whether it should have been done at all. For most of the film, we watch Viggo Mortensen, as the Man, and Kodi Smit-McPhee, as the Boy, walk through a dichromatic gray-brown post-apocalyptic landscape, peopled only by a few survivors (some of them cannibals feasting on human captives). The grimly punitive monotony of the leafless, colorless, humorless production may fool some people into thinking it's art. With the golden Charlize Theron, as the Man's wife (seen in a flashback to better days), and Robert Duvall, as a bitter old coot waiting to die. Shot in a wrecked industrial landscape near Pittsburgh. Screenplay by Joe Penhall. Directed by John Hillcoat.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

THE TWILIGHT SAGA: NEW MOON

The second installment in the "Twilight" series is a glacially paced exercise in longing that comes alive only when the gorgeous actors Robert Pattinson and Taylor Lautner strut their stuff. This time, the chaste romance of Bella (Kristen Stewart) with the brooding vampire Edward (Pattinson) gets sidelined when he goes away in order to protect her from his clan. She's then befriended by Jacob (Lautner), a hunky werewolf who also longs for her. The film meanders while Bella wrestles with her affections and the script runs through its vampire plotlines. The intrigue is in the competing moods that result as frustrated hormonal desire leads to let's-fight-over-the-girl antics. It's supremely unreal, a Harlequin romance for the goth set.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

UP IN THE AIR

At long last, George Clooney meets his match. There have been previous attempts to pair him in romantic comedies, such as "Intolerable Cruelty," but, from the moment when, playing a business traveller named Ryan Bingham, he picks up Alex Goran (Vera Farmiga) in a bar, we realize that a battle of equals has commenced. Bingham fires people for a living (the director, Jason Reitman, could not have timed his movie better), while most of his own living is done on planes and in hotel rooms; he is a rootless soul who mistakes his emptiness for freedom, and it takes the efforts of Alex, his occasional lover, and of Natalie (Anna Kendrick), his perky new colleague, to school

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TABLES FOR TWO
BARK HOT DOGS

Bark
HOT DOGS

HONORÉ BROWN

474 Bergen St., Brooklyn (718-789-1939)—Fitting that the New York hot dog should receive its latest refurbishment on this North Park Slope block, a strip that recently swapped its insurance agencies and nonprofits for half a dozen jarringly unscuffed storefronts, including a sex shop and a maternity boutique, each painted its own exuberant color—call it the "Truman Show" effect. Bark is a fierce reproach to the aqueous cart fare of Times Square and Central Park. The dogs here aren't pinkish-gray or wizened. They're about seven inches long, too big for their buns, and the ends curl upward to form, if not a smile, at least a knowing smirk. As you bite down, the tensile strength holds for a fleeting second, before a pop and the flow of juices. Besides the mess you make, there is no diner's remorse: the first sausage makes you ache for the second. Even the veggie dog (potato, apple, and sage, sculpted appropriately) is good enough for you to understand how the vegetarian counter girl justifies working here.

Bark is operated by Brandon Gillis and Joshua Sharkey, two chefs who must have been irked by their share of ballgames and cookouts. The guys make most of the topping options themselves, including delicious chili, sauerkraut, and baked beans. The meat underneath is an artisanal amalgam of pork and beef basted in smoked lard butter. (An all-beef dog is available, too.) The enveloping buns—the split-top, lobster-roll variety—are reassuringly warm and crispy. The menu includes a burger (functional), fries and onion rings (spot-on), and specials such as a crispy pork sandwich with spicy coleslaw (overwrought). The sole vestiges from the back-yard gathering are Heinz ketchup, French's mustard, and lots of alcohol. At Bark, you are as likely to encounter a dude departing with his girl and a growler (sixty-four ounces of beer in a returnable glass jug) as you are a kid with a skateboard and a milkshake.

The atmosphere at Bark is industrial-chic: walls and tables of reclaimed pine, stools of unpolished steel, and hanging lights of an interrogatory mode. As for eco-consciousness, Gillis and Sharkey are not to be outperformed. Table tents, printed on one-hundred-per-cent-recycled paper, tell you things like where the cabbage comes from and that Tri-State Biodiesel regularly collects the kitchen's grease. Practically everything, from your uneaten food to the plant-derived "plastic" cups, gets composted. The information is interesting, but its presentation verges on self-righteous. A more succinct sign might have conserved further resources: "You and your kind waste a lot." (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner, weekends for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Hot dogs $4.25-$7.)

—*Mike Peed*

him in the error of his ways. Reitman's film both satisfies and dismays; the one-liners fly back and forth, but, if you happen to look down, there are oceans of hopelessness below. With Jason Bateman as Bingham's cynical boss.—*A.L.* (12/7/09) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

A CHRISTMAS CAROL: In wide release. **LOOT:** In limited release. **OLD DOGS:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"Beyond the Absurd: Ronald Tavel and Andy Warhol." All films are directed by Warhol. Dec. 10 at 7 and Dec. 13 at 5:30: "Screen Test #1" (1965). ♦ Dec. 10 at 9 and Dec. 13 at 7: "Screen Test #2" (1965). ♦ Dec. 11 at 7 and Dec. 13 at 4: "Hedy" (1966). ♦ Dec. 11 at 9 and Dec. 14 at 7: "Vinyl" (1965). ♦ Dec. 12 at 4 and Dec. 14 at 8:45: "Kitchen" (1965). ♦ Dec. 12 at 5:30: "The Life of Juanita Castro" (1965). ♦ Dec. 12 at 7 and Dec. 15 at 8:45: "Horse" (1965). ♦ Dec. 12 at 9:15: "Harlot" (1964). ♦ Dec. 13 at 8:30 and Dec. 15 at 7: "Space" (1965). ♦ "Essential Cinema." Dec. 12 at 8:15: "Beauty and the Beast" (1946, Jean Cocteau; in French). ♦ Dec. 13 at 4:30: "Blood of a Poet" (1930, Cocteau; in French). ♦ Dec. 13 at 6: "Orpheus" (1950, Cocteau; in French). ♦ Dec. 13 at 8: "The Testament of Orpheus" (1959, Cocteau; in French).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"The Next Director." Dec. 9 at 6:50 and 9:30: "In Between Days" (2006, So Yong Kim; in Korean). The 6:50 screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ Dec. 10 at 6:50 and 9:30: "The Exploding Girl" (2009, Bradley Rust Gray). The 6:50 screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ Dec. 11 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:40: "Treeless Mountain" (2009, Kim; in Korean). ♦ Dec. 15 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Rosetta" (1999, Jean-Pierre Dardenne and Luc Dardenne; in French).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—The films of James Whale. Dec. 9 at 1, 4:45, and 8: "Remember Last Night?" (1935). ♦ Dec. 9 at 2:35, 6:20, and 10:05: "Show Boat" (1936). ♦ Dec. 10 at 2, 5:35, and 9:10: "One More River" (1934). ♦ Dec. 5 at 3:40 and 7:15: "The Road Back" (1937). ♦ "Madcap Manhattan." Dec. 11-12 at 1, 4:40, and 8:20: "Holiday" (1938, George Cukor). ♦ Dec. 11-12 at 2:50, 6:30, and 10:10: "The Awful Truth" (1937, Leo McCarey). ♦ Dec. 13-14 at 2:25, 6:10, and 9:55: "You Can't Take It with You" (1938, Frank Capra). ♦ Dec. 13-14 at 1:00, 4:45, and 8:30: "If You Could Only Cook" (1935, William A. Seiter). ♦ Dec. 15 at 1, 4:35, and 8:10: "My Sister Eileen" (1942, Alexander Hall). ♦ Dec. 15 at 2:50, 6:25, and 10: "A Night to Remember" (1943, Richard Wallace).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—"Spanish Cinema Now." Dec. 11 at 3:45 and Dec. 13 at 7:45: "Camino" (2008, Javier Fesser). ♦ Dec. 11 at 8:50: "The Good News" (2008, Helena Taberna). ♦ Dec. 12 at 7:15 and Dec. 15 at 4:30: "Mediterranean Food" (2009, Joaquín Oristrell). ♦ "Film Comment Selects." Dec. 15 at 7:30: "Repo Man" (1984, Alex Cox), followed by an open-bar after-party.

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Dec. 22: The films of François Truffaut. Dec. 15 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "A Gorgeous Girl Like Me" (†).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Movie Night with James Toback." Dec. 10 at 7: "F for Fake" (1975, Orson Welles), followed by a discussion with Toback. ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Dec. 11 and 12: "2001: A Space Odyssey" (1968, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ In revival. Dec. 12 at 11 A.M.: "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" (1958, Richard Brooks). ♦ Dec. 13 at 11 A.M.: "The Fugitive Kind" (1960, Sidney Lumet). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Dec. 15 at 8: "I'm Dangerous with Love" (2009, Michel Negroponte), followed by a discussion with the director.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"An Auteurist History of Film." Dec. 11-13 at 1:30: "Amarilly of Clothes-Line Alley" (†) and "The Jackknife Man" (1920, King Vidor; silent). ♦ The films of Dino Risi. All films are in Italian. Dec. 10 at 4:30 and Dec. 13 at 5:30: "Scent of a Woman" (1974). ♦ Dec. 10 at 8: "The Easy Life" (1962). ♦ Dec. 11 at 4:30: "Poor, But Beautiful" (1957). ♦ Dec. 11 at 8 and Dec. 13 at 3: "A Difficult Life" (1961). ♦ Dec. 12 at 1 and Dec. 14 at 6:30: "A Beautiful Vacation" (2006, Fabrizio Corallo). ♦ Dec. 12 at 2:30 and Dec. 14 at 8:30: "Scandal in Sorrento" (1955). ♦ Dec. 12 at 6: "Love and Larceny" (1959). ♦ Dec. 13 at 1: "Dear Father" (1979). ♦ Dec. 14 at 4:30: "The Sign of Venus" (1955).

MAYSLES CINEMA
343 Lenox Ave. at Malcolm X Blvd. (212-582-6050)—"Documentaries in Bloom." Dec. 12 at 3:30: "Paradise" (2009, Michael Almereyda), followed by a Q. & A. with the director.

READINGS AND TALKS

"SECRET SCIENCE CLUB"
This periodical gathering of entertaining scientists presents two events this month. On Dec. 8 at 8, the neuroscientist Ben Backus discusses the biological and emotional roots of perception. On Dec. 15 at 8, the climatologist James Hansen, who is the director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, rings the alarm about global warming. (The Bell House, 149 7th St., between Second and Third Aves. 718-643-6510.)

EDGAR ALLAN POE READING
The actors Fritz Weaver, Louis Hobson, Tammy Grimes, and Betsy von Furstenberg celebrate the bicentenary of Poe's birth with a program of his short stories and poems. (St. Peter's Church,

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Lexington Ave. at 54th St. No tickets necessary. Dec. 11 at 12:30.)

92ND STREET Y

Christopher Kimball, the host of "America's Test Kitchen," and Jack Bishop, the show's editorial director, do more than just talk about the show's new season: they'll show a clip from it and share food with the audience. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Dec. 14 at 8:15.)

"PORNOGRAPHY IN THE CITY"

The City University of New York Graduate Center's James Gallery and the Center for the Humanities present a symposium on the history and significance of images that are hard to define but easy to recognize. With the writers Rachel Kramer Bussel, Jeff Escoffier, and Douglas Crimp; the academics Melissa Ragona, Amy Herzog, William Kornblum, and Dagmar Herzog; the artist Bjarne Melgaard; and the former peep-show worker Linda Ford. (Graduate Center, Fifth Ave. at 34th St. 212-817-2005. Dec. 15, from 2 to 6.)

HI-FI BAR

Thomas Beller and Joanna Yas celebrate the holidays and the publication of the latest edition of their literary magazine, *Open City*, with a reading by the contributors Jonathan Dee and Sam Lipsyte and an open bar. (Hi-Fi Bar, 169 Avenue A, between 10th and 11th Sts. Tickets at the door. Dec. 15 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"CARTOONS IN CONFLICT"

The Parents Circle Families Forum, a grassroots group of Israelis and Palestinians who have lost loved ones because of the region's conflict, and No Longer Empty, a local organization that turns vacant storefronts into gallery spaces, present an exhibition of drawings exploring Palestinian-and-Israeli relations by forty political cartoonists from around the world, including Pat Oliphant, Jeff Danziger, and Liza Donnelly. The show opens on Dec. 10 with a reception at 6, featuring Robi Damelin, an Israeli who lost her son to a Palestinian sniper, and Mazan Faraj, whose father was shot and killed by Israeli forces. (6 W. 26th St. 212-593-6400, ext. 1579. The exhibition is open Thursdays through Sundays from noon to 7. Through Dec. 23.)

"UNSILENT NIGHT"

Greenwich Village will be but one location this year (other locations include Albuquerque, Chicago, and Melbourne) for the composer Phil Kline's Christmas cult classic, an hour-long promenade in which the neighborhood is serenaded by a "participatory sound sculpture" produced by a swelling chorus of boom boxes. The trail runs from Washington Square Park to Tompkins Square Park. (www.unsilentnight.com. Dec. 12 at 7.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

The auction houses, cruising toward the holidays, make a final push with a week of antiquities and jewels. Statues predominate at **Christie's** antiquities sale (Dec. 11), a gathering of gods, goddesses, and rulers large and small; one of the more beautiful pieces, however, is a depiction of a young girl with tight curls and a sweet expression, carved in Cyrenaica (now part of Libya) in the fourth century B.C. The afternoon offers treasures for lovers of ancient jewelry, such as an imposing Roman cameo portrait of the Emperor Constantine made out of sardonyx, characterized by its reddish hue. The modern versions of these shimmering objects of desire, including several spectacular colored diamonds and a rather impressive gold-and-diamond "Printemps" necklace by Buccelatti, go under the gavel on the previous day (Dec. 10). (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Sotheby's** covers some of the same ground, beginning with a sale of jewelry (Dec. 9) that features the collection of the late Lúcia Moreira Salles, a Brazilian-born fashion icon (she was a model for Chanel and Valentino in the sixties) with a refined taste in jewels. The lots include diamond, emerald, and ruby rings by the reclusive Parisian jeweller JAR (whose house makes only seventy to eighty pieces a year), as well as oodles of pearls. This sale is followed by the house's antiquities auction (Dec. 10), encompassing Egyptian, Persian, Greek, Roman, Etruscan, and Asiatic works of art. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ On Dec. 12, **Phillips** holds one of its new "themed" auctions, this one focussed on images of New York. A collection of disparate items, the sale includes a cast-resin sculpture by Erwin Wurm, "Guggenheim (Melting)" (the title says it all), as well as photographs of various well-known sites by Steichen, Hiroshi Sugimoto, and others; an Art Deco cocktail shaker; and a screen-print portrait of Merce Cunningham holding a chair, by Andy Warhol. (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)

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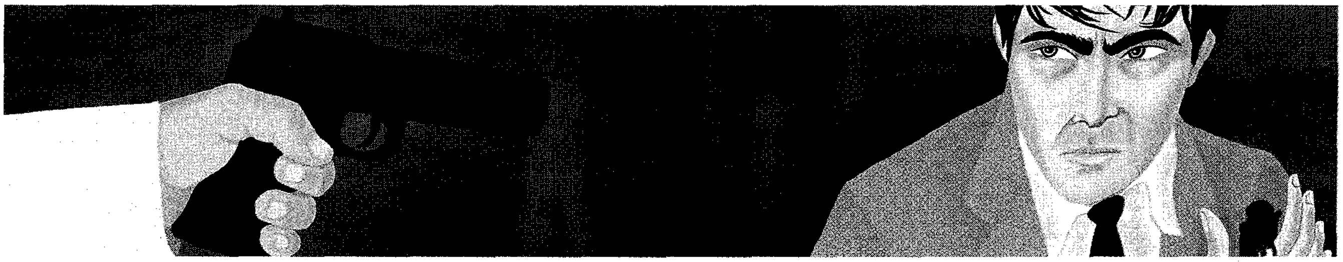

An Akira Kurosawa retrospective at Film Forum.

DIVYA SRINIVASAN

ON THE HORIZON

THE THEATRE
FAMILIAL LOVE

Dec. 28

Liev Schreiber and Scarlett Johansson star in a revival of Arthur Miller's "A View from the Bridge," directed by Gregory Mosher, at the Cort. Schreiber plays a Brooklyn dockworker, and Johansson, in her Broadway début, plays his teen-age niece. (212-239-6200.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
HABANERA HOLIDAY

Dec. 31-May 1

Will the Met's new production of "Carmen" be a triumph or a flop? The company is certainly not stinting on talent: Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducts casts that include such stars as Elīna Garanča, Barbara Frittoli, Roberto Alagna, and Jonas Kaufmann. (212-362-6000.)

NIGHT LIFE
HOME SWEET HOME

Jan. 5-30

The Broadway legend Elaine Stritch lives at the Carlyle hotel, and in recent years she has turned its legendary café into her own stomping ground. Her new show is called "At Home at the Carlyle: Elaine Stritch Singin' Sondheim . . . One Song at a Time." (212-744-1600.)

MOVIES
MAN FROM JAPAN

Jan. 6-Feb. 4

Film Forum celebrates the Akira Kurosawa centenary with twenty-eight of his movies, including such familiar historical dramas as "Throne of Blood," "The Seven Samurai," and "Rashomon," realistic postwar dramas ("Ikiru" and "I Live in Fear"), and such police thrillers as "Stray Dog" (released in 1949) and "High and Low" (from 1963). (212-727-8110.)

ART
RUNNING ON EMPTY

Feb. 12-April 28

Nature may abhor a vacuum, but Frank Lloyd Wright didn't. For "Contemplating the Void," the Guggenheim invites some two hundred artists, architects, and designers—including Ai Weiwei, Daniel Libeskind, and Rachel Whiteread—to submit their wildest reimaginations for the soaring vacant space in the center of the museum's spiralling ramp. (212-423-3500.)

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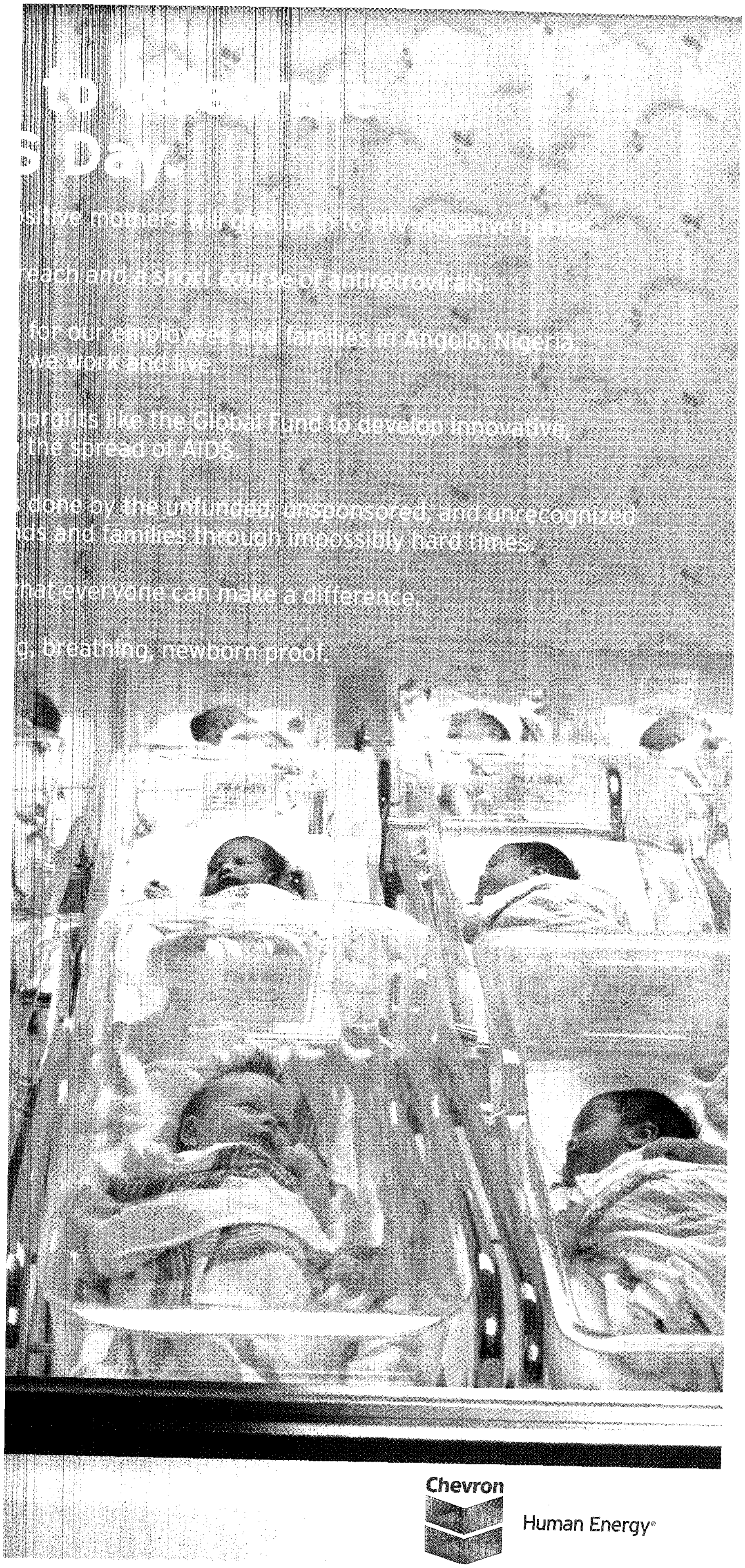
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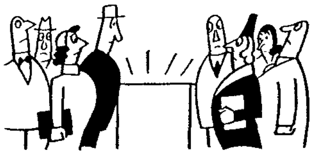
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

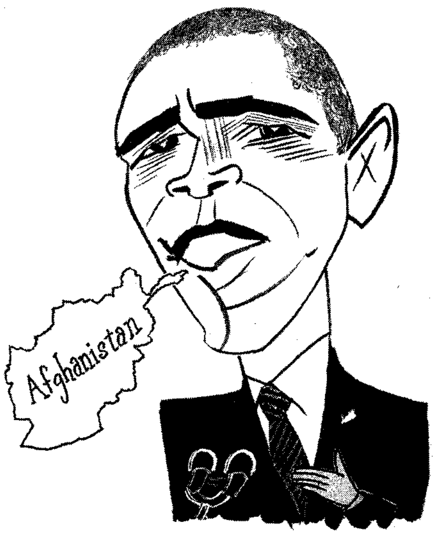
COMMENT
BAD CHOICES



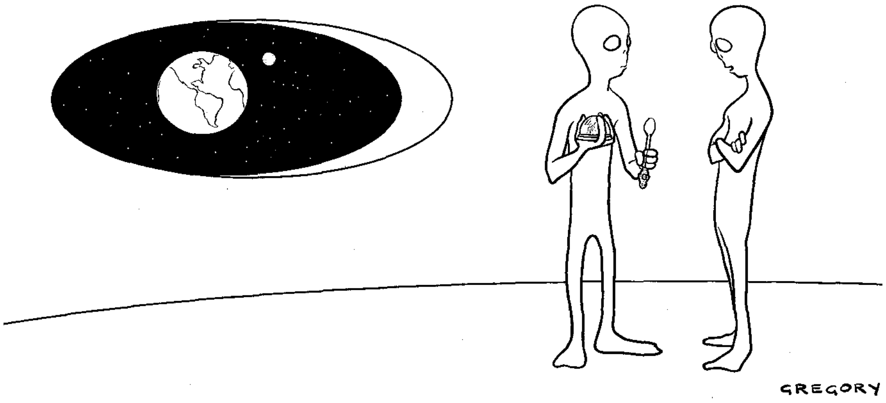
There are no good options for the United States in Afghanistan. That has been the conventional wisdom for some years now, and this time the conventional wisdom—the reigning cliché—happens to be true. President Obama did not pretend otherwise in his address at West Point last week. His grimly businesslike speech was a gritty, almost masochistic exercise in the taking of responsibility. What he had to say did not please everyone; indeed, it pleased no one. Given the situation bequeathed to him and to the nation, pleasure was not an option. His speech was a sombre appeal to reason, not a rousing call to arms. If his argument was less than fully persuasive, that was in the nature of the choices before him. There is no such thing as an airtight argument for a bad choice—not if the argument is made with a modicum of honesty.

In November, two months into the gruelling, three-month review of Afghanistan policy that culminated in last week's address, the Pentagon offered the President four options, each accompanied by a number, with each number representing an increase in the American troop commitment. But these were variations on a theme. As Obama seems to have realized, his true choices, of which there were also four, were wider and more fundamental: to begin immediately to wind down the American military presence; to maintain the status quo; to commit to a more or less open-ended, more or less full-fledged "counter-insurgency" war; or to pursue some version of the course he has now charted, in which a fresh infusion of military force and civilian effort is paired with a strong signal that America's patience and resources, on which there are many other demands, are not unlimited.

Obama did the best he could to make a positive case for the path he has chosen, but—chillingly, bleakly—the principal virtue of his choice remains the vices of the others. Withdrawal, beginning at once? The political and diplomatic damage to Obama would be severe: a probable Pentagon revolt; the anger of NATO allies who have risked their soldiers' lives (and their leaders' political standing) on our behalf; the near-certainty that a large-scale terrorist attack, whether or not it had anything to do with Afghanistan, would be met at home not with 9/11 solidarity but with savage, politically lethal scapegoating. Even so, if "success," however narrowly defined, is truly an outright impossibility, then withdrawal may still be the most responsible choice. But it is not yet obvious that a better result is out of the question. "To abandon this area now," the President said, "would significantly hamper our ability to keep the pressure on Al Qaeda and create an unacceptable risk of additional attacks on our homeland and our allies." The consequences could also include a second Taliban emirate, a long, bloody civil war, and a sharp, destabilizing increase in Islamist violence, not only in Pakistan but also in India and elsewhere. The status quo? To "muddle through and permit a slow deterioration," the President said, "would ultimately prove more costly and prolong our stay in Afghanistan, because we would never be able to generate the conditions needed to train Afghan security forces and give them the space to take over." Or a full-scale counter-insurgency war—in the President's words, a "dramatic and open-ended escalation of our war effort, one that would commit us to a nation-building project of up to a decade"? That, too, must be rejected, "because it sets goals that are beyond what can be achieved at a reasonable cost and what we need to achieve to secure our interests." Such a war—such a project—would be hugely



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL



"I'm a little disappointed that we didn't get any human specimens, but I think our leaders will be quite pleased with the snow globe and the commemorative spoon."

out of proportion to whatever marginal security gains it might yield. And it wouldn't just be beyond "a reasonable cost." It would be beyond our political, institutional, and material capacity, and therefore impossible.

A dismal process of elimination has left the President to design a strategy that he believes is the only one that offers a chance, in his words, "to bring this war to a successful conclusion." Or, at least, a bearable one. Deliver a hard punch to the Taliban, break its momentum, and welcome its defectors; throw a bucket of cold water on the hapless and corrupt central government; carve out space and time for projects of civilian betterment and the development of Afghan forces that are capable of maintaining some semblance of security; forge "an effective partnership with Pakistan"—to list the elements of Obama's strategy is to recognize its difficulty. It is full of internal tensions, most prominently between the buildup of troops and the eighteen-month timeline for beginning their withdrawal. (To the extent that the troop surge weakens the enemy while the timeline focusses minds in Kabul and Islamabad, however, that tension could be a creative one.) The plan does not, of course, guarantee success. The best that can be claimed for it is that it does not guarantee failure, as, in one form or another, the alternatives almost certainly do.

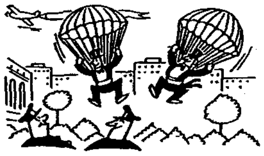
At West Point in June of 2002, George W. Bush proclaimed to the graduating cadets, "Our war on terror is only begun, but in Afghanistan it has begun well." In truth, it had not begun so well. Six months earlier, the first Taliban emirate had indeed been routed from power. But, at the same time, the perpetrator of 9/11 had been allowed to escape from his mountain hideout; the American forces that could have captured him were held back by an Administration already planning its misguided invasion of Iraq. The evidence, a Senate Foreign Relations Committee report concluded last week, "removes any lingering doubts and makes it clear that Osama bin Laden was within our grasp at Tora Bora."

That was the speech in which the then President—no doubt with Iraq in mind, though he made no mention of that country—expanded what was already being called the Bush Doctrine to embrace the notion of preventive war. Obama, in the aftermath of his West Point speech, was widely condemned—and grudgingly praised—for allegedly adopting "what sounds like the Bush Doctrine" (Rachel Maddow) and "a rehash of the Bush Doctrine" (Mary Matalin). Not so. Whatever the Afghanistan war's origins (and they were retributive, not preventive, except in the sense that every war, and every act of statecraft, is aimed at "preventing" something), this is not a preventive war. It is an actually existing war, and Obama's purpose is clearly to bring it to a non-disastrous end.

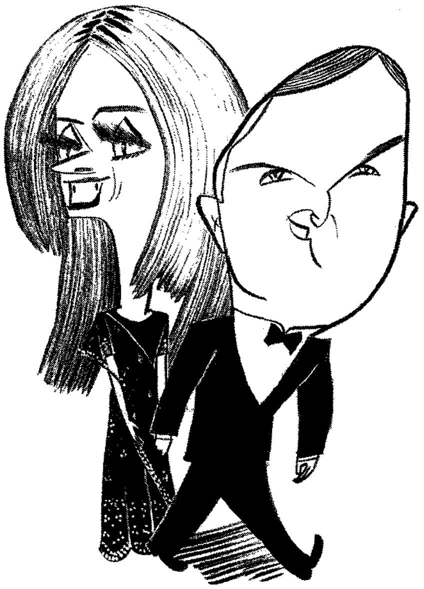
The botched war in Afghanistan, like the economic crisis and the broken health-care system, is an inheritance from which Obama is trying to extricate the country. In each case, the institutional, historical, and political constraints under which a President must operate mean that the solutions—or, if there are no solutions, the ameliorations—are doomed to be nearly as messy as the problems. If there is no Obama Doctrine, there is an Obama approach—undergirded by humane values but also by a respect for reality. The most telling signpost in Obama's speech may have been neither his call for more troops nor his timeline for removing them but his use of a quotation from another President who inherited a seemingly intractable war: "Each proposal must be weighed in the light of a broader consideration: the need to maintain balance in and among national programs." That was Dwight D. Eisenhower, in one of the homelier passages from his canonical farewell address, delivered the year Barack Obama was born. President Eisenhower's point was that a nation's security is all of a piece—that military actions do not inhabit a separate universe but must be weighed on the same scale, and be subject to the same judgments, as a nation's other vital concerns. That seems to be President Obama's point as well.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

DEPT. OF HOOPLA
GETTING IN



Selma Fonseca, a Brazilian in New York, calculates that she has gatecrashed more than two thousand parties. She is writing a book largely on that subject—although, as she said last week, "I never felt like I was crashing. I saw it as: I want to go to a party and I'm going to go." She had three pieces of advice for an uninvited guest. One, "Look the part. If it's P. Diddy's White Party and you turn up in black, you weren't invited." (This does not help anyone understand how Aaron Barschak, a gatecrasher, gained access to Windsor Castle, in 2003, to attend Prince William's twenty-first-birthday party, wearing an Osama bin Laden beard and a peach-colored dress. The party had an "Out of Africa" theme.) Two, move in the slipstream of celebrity; Fonseca recalls trailing Gwyneth Paltrow into *Vanity Fair's* Oscar party in 1999—the clear high point in a career of unwelcomeness. And, three, "Don't ever look the security guys in the eye." To do so is to acknowledge that they might have some role in your life.



Michaele and Tareq Salahi

Seeming to confirm this last point, Toby Young, the British journalist and "Top Chef" judge, recently described a technique that he says has worked in both London and New York. "With a female co-conspirator, you approach the velvet rope in the throes of a full-blown row. You increase the volume, and make sure it's clear that you loathe each other. Natural human reluctance to get involved in a 'domestic' means that the bouncers will lift the velvet rope and wave you through." Did he remember the feigned arguments? "One was about whose responsibility it was that a rented videotape was now overdue," he said.

This detail suggested that his technique had been untested for some years, and it hinted at a larger truth: if there was a golden age of gate-crashing—an era of panache and serendipity and Blockbuster late fees—it is surely over now; and this may be why the news from the White House state dinner was so arresting, like the report of an airship making a landing on the Sheep Meadow. For all the modernity of the media ambitions of Michaele and Tareq Salahi, their stunt referred to a simpler time—such as was recalled last week by Alfred Morgan, a retired New York businessman. He said that he and four friends had worn borrowed Navy uniforms to gate-crash the débutante ball thrown for Carol Buckley, a sister of William F. Buckley, in the late nineteen-fifties. "They couldn't have been more gracious," he said, before adding that when he and his wife, Virginia, were married, in 1965, the reception, at the St. Regis Hotel, was gate-crashed, in a welcome way, by Salvador Dali, as perhaps all weddings were in 1965.

Today, a New York party on any scale will involve the unyielding apparatus of clipboards and walkie-talkie headsets. Nadine Johnson, the New York-based publicist and event organizer, said that she takes the trouble to download photographs of her guests from the Internet and attach them to the lists held by her staff. Crashing is largely attempted not at the party but in the days before, by e-mail. (For every invitation sent by e-mail, a publicist might receive two R.S.V.P.s.) To the extent that crashers are still seen in the flesh, they come in two categories, she said. First, insiders: "They do belong, or feel they belong, because their friends were invited." Second, outsiders: "They seem to be so genuinely pleased to get in. It's like El Dorado." But Johnson, dwelling for a moment on the apparent decline of the committed full-time crasher, sounded almost sad. There was "the guy with long hair" and "the tall Indian-looking guy who said he was from Australian Consolidated Media. They've disappeared. They were colorful and kind of endearing."

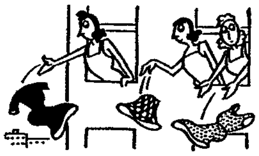
Peggy Siegal, the veteran New York publicist, added, "There's one girl, dark-haired and creepy, who tried to befriend the guys in my office, and they felt sorry for her. Every time I saw her, I called the guards and had them throw her out. This is someone who has a compulsive need to humiliate herself."

And the Salahis? James Clifford, an anthropologist at U.C. Santa Cruz, offered a post-structuralist reading. "An exclusive dinner creates (a) élite status or belonging; (b) envy, a bad feeling about distinctions and hierarchy; (c) gossip, what 'really' went on inside; and (d) transgression—gate-crashing," he said. "All of these need to be public, in some sense, for the social function to matter, to be meaningful." A party-crasher, revealed, shows that a party occurred. "What if the crashers had not been caught, had attended the dinner, and had told no one?" he said. "Transgression depends on the law. The avant-garde needs the bourgeoisie; the smuggler needs the police to create the value of the goods." Clifford reflected for a while, and then added, "But if someone sneaks in with a bomb and blows everyone up, then it's hard to think of gate-crashing as an innocent kind of social performance."

—Ian Parker

THE BOARDS

YOU'RE WEARING THAT?



A handful of men were in the crowd the other night at "Love, Loss, and What I Wore," the Off Broadway play by Nora and Delia Ephron that is based on Ilene Beckerman's best-selling memoir of her wardrobe. (Word was that Edward Norton was somewhere at the rear of the packed house.) But the majority of the audience was female, as has been the case since the play opened, and front and center was a group of twenty-five ladies, brought together by Michele Cohen, a homemaker and mother of four from the Upper East Side. "I was at the opening night, and I thought, I want to see this with my daughter," Cohen said in the lobby before the show. "I did an e-mail blast. I have a friend from fifth grade here. My decorator. Friends from my kids' kindergarten and nursery schools. Someone I do beading with." A woman in a handsome raincoat strode past and waved. "Another parent from Riverdale Country School," Cohen said.

There was a preponderance of cashmere (black, brown) and sober but chic wool pants (brown, black) among Cohen's group, whose members ranged in age from the mid-twenties to close to seventy, and who laughed and wept as the first-person frock stories unfurled onstage. (Biggest laugh: when Capathia Jenkins said, "If my elbows faced forward, I would kill myself." Biggest gasp: when Rhea Perlman, as Ilene Beckerman, showed a sketch of the black-and-red print taffeta maternity dress she'd worn for her six pregnancies, then said, "David died when he was eighteen months old from a forty-eight-hour intestinal virus.")

Afterward, the ladies gathered in the aisles and shared sartorial reminiscences of their own. "Ah, the skinny white pants I wore in the lobby of the Imperial Hotel in Japan," Mike Peissis, who had on a stylish taupe cardigan, sighed, as she recalled an outfit from 1983, the year of her marriage. Peissis had brought Carly Schwartzwald, her daughter's best friend, since her daughter had become ill at the last moment. "I'm only twenty-five, and my grandmother says, 'Why not always dress your best?' " Schwartzwald said. "So for Thanksgiving I wore a sparkly jacket, and I said, 'Grandma, I'm wearing it for you.' " At the theatre, Schwartzwald was wearing a new black cashmere cardigan that she had bought the day after Thanksgiving, apparently sparkled out.

Jill Leider, who mentioned that she had been a classmate of Nora Ephron's at Beverly Hills High, said that she was shocked by what people—including herself—wear these days. "In the seventies, we dressed," she said. "The hot pants! I remember going to La Grenouille in our shorts and boots. At one point, I had thirty Courrèges and as many Puccis. We all did. I wouldn't have gone to the supermarket then in what I wear to a restaurant now. When I first came to New York, everything was suits and white kid gloves. I can remember like yesterday—Bobby Kennedy was marching in New York, and I went with my parents to watch. I had a blue wool bouclé suit—like a Chanel, but it wasn't a Chanel—and beige pumps. And it was always hard handbags." Leider was wearing an Armani jacket, a black cashmere sweater, and wool pin-striped pants. "From Banana Republic," she said with disdain. "I should have today the clothes I had then."

Rhea Perlman and her daughter, Lucy DeVito, who was also in the show—her monologue in the character of a lesbian bride buying a wedding gown in "eggplanty maroon" was a standout—waved to the assembled women as they made their exit up the aisle. Mollie Cohen, Michele Cohen's daughter, described her earliest clothing memory: "A pink skirt, with leggings attached, that I had when I was really young. I wore it to school. That was the Madonna era."

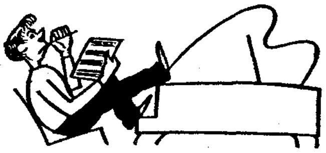
"You wore a school uniform," her mother said.

"I wore it to nursery school," Mollie replied.

As the last audience members left the theatre, Nancy Fisher said, wistfully, "I had a purple Empire-waist coat and everybody said I looked like Jackie Kennedy. Now I look like her grandmother." But Fisher's most vivid dress memory was not of a gown that she had worn herself. "I'm a New York mother, and when my daughter was bat mizvahed—she was sixteen, not thirteen—I went back and forth to Saks, to Bergdorf's, to look for a party dress for her, and chose all these things," she said. "She spat on them all, and then she marched off to Dolce & Gabbana. Her dress cost more than my dress. I was upended as a mother." But there was no need for maternal redress. "We still have the dress," Fisher said. "We still have the pictures of the dress; and I still have my daughter."

—*Rebecca Mead*

THE MUSICAL LIFE
COMEBACK



If you want a license to perform music by Philip Glass, you have to call Glass's company, Dunvagen Music Publishers, whose director is Jim Keller. Keller is fifty-five, tall and lanky, and is also a musician—he sings and plays the guitar—and he recently finished a record, "Sunshine in My Pocket," consisting of songs he has written lately. With luck, one will sell a million copies, the way another of his songs, "867-5309/Jenny," did, in 1982, when Keller was a member of the band Tommy Tutone, and "Jenny," for a while, was No. 1 on the Top Forty.

The other evening, after rehearsing with his band in a studio on Eighth Avenue, Keller said that he wrote "Jenny" with a friend, Alex Call. "Nothing is cooler for a rock-and-roll musician than to hear yourself on the radio of a car driving by," he said. "Then, however, you're trying to follow that up. The record company was handing us songs that it thought would duplicate the success, and we started not getting along, and with a band, if you're not having fun you're in trouble, and then it fell apart, as it should have. Do I miss it? All you have to do is watch any of those 'Where Are They Now?' shows. It's not a pretty picture. Someone could find the cure for cancer, but if he ended up on one of those shows he'd still look pathetic. I miss it, but not anymore does it dictate how I operate."

After Tommy Tutone dissolved, Keller struggled for a number of years to make a living playing music and finally gave up. "If I'd had three hits, I wouldn't have needed a job, but one hit I couldn't live on," he said. Roughly fifteen years ago, a project led to his calling Glass's office. When he called a second time and heard that the guy he'd been speaking to had left, he asked if the company was looking to replace him, and then talked his way into an interview with Glass. Glass recalled that when he interviewed Keller "he had none of the conventional qualifications that I thought someone should have. I asked, 'What do you know about the music business?,' and he said, 'Only what I learned on the street,' but that's how *I* learned, so it didn't sound bad to me. He said, 'What did you pay the last guy?,' and I told him, and he said, 'I'll come and work for you for that, and, if I double your income in the first year, you'll double my salary.' I thought about that for about thirty seconds, and I realized, That could be great for me, and he did it."

Keller figured that Glass had plenty of people around him who appreciated his music. "He didn't need another Philip Glass fan in his life," Keller said. "The company, though, was saying no to everything, and I thought maybe the answer could be yes, if you were willing to do things the way Philip wanted to do them. I knew the way it worked on the pop side, so I set about to learn how it worked on the classical side. My first day, I showed up in a tie with a lunch bucket practically."

In the meantime, Keller put his guitar in its case and left it there for ten years. He got married, and he and his wife had a daughter, who is now twelve. When he began playing again, about four years ago, he said that he "had to find guys I could be terrible with." Glass asked why he had suddenly started writing new songs, assembling lyrics in taxis and on subways, using what little free time he had, and Keller told him, "To save my life"—"It's what any artist would say," Glass said. Glass, however, has never heard Keller's music. "I don't know what it is," he said. "He's never played it for me, and he never invites me when he plays, either. I understood that he wants a lot of room to be back in the music world on his own terms. He didn't need to go out there again in the pop-stardom way. He's had that."

Jim Keller

Keller often plays at the Lakeside Lounge, on Avenue B, in a storefront room adjacent to the bar. The room has five tables, and the other evening Keller's audience, which included two people when he started, grew to about fifteen. When he played "Jenny," several people turned with quizzical expressions from the bar and the television. By the end of the night, Keller seemed very pleased. "If I can write something that works for me and then also in a bar band, I'm in heaven," he said.

—*Alec Wilkinson*

LOCAL TASTE DEPT.
ON TOP OF SPAGHETTI

Edward Youkilis grew up in Cincinnati, and dreamed of becoming a painter and living in New York City. After leaving the Master of Fine Arts program at Yale, in 1971, he landed a job as an assistant to Helen Frankenthaler and found lodging on the parlor floor of her town house, on the Upper East Side. In time, he drifted away from the arts and down to the neighborhood later known as Tribeca. He started working in night clubs and restaurants and, in 2001, opened his own place, Edward's, on West Broadway.

Youkilis, who is now sixty-two and has the demeanor and the girth of a born host, used his restaurant as a kind of temp agency for recent arrivals from his home town. "I hired all these Cincinnati kids as waiters," he said the other day. "And one of them, his mom sent him some cans of Cincinnati chili as a present. Me and this other kid—a bartender from Dayton—we started eating it in here, and people started coming in off the street, asking, 'Is that Skyline chili?' "—a reference to the brand. "So I thought maybe we could make a night of it." At first, it was an informal thing. "We told friends from Cincinnati that we were going to serve chili, and people showed up."

Cincinnati-style chili has little in common with the Texas variety except for the ardor of its fans. The core concoction consists of ground beef in a thin, tomato-based sauce that is tangy rather than spicy. (Chocolate is rumored to be a secret ingredient.) In the basic presentation, the chili is poured over slightly overcooked spaghetti and topped with shredded Cheddar cheese; this is known as a "three-way." Adding onions or red beans makes it a four-way; adding onions and red beans turns it into a five-way. There is no such thing as a six-way, although oyster crackers are the customary garnish. Chili and cheese on a hot dog is called a Coney.

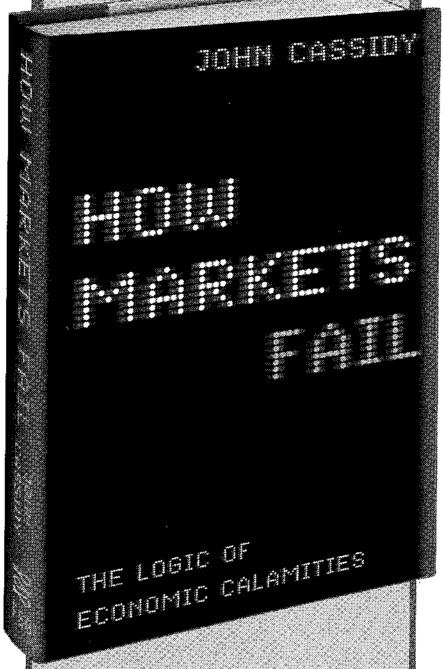
Youkilis prevailed on Skyline, the leading purveyor of Cincinnati chili, and a fast-food empire in Ohio, to ship a few cans to New York. In 2006, Edward's started hosting occasional chili fests, but the public began demanding more. So Youkilis declared the last Monday of every month to be Cincinnati Night, featuring Skyline chili, ribs imported from the Montgomery Inn (another Queen City landmark), and ice cream from Graeter's, a local chain that draws on the community's German roots. On an average Monday, Youkilis serves about eighty dinners, but on Cincinnati Night the clientele doubles. (He also keeps a stash of chili on hand for his nephew Kevin, who often comes by with teammates when the Red Sox are in town.)

The monthly festival has turned out to be tough to pull off. Cincinnati chili has never really caught on outside the region bounded by Columbus, to the north, Indianapolis, to the west, and Kentucky, to the south, so there's not much of an export infrastructure. "We've tried a lot of different things, and still none of our suppliers will give us a deal," Youkilis said. The authentic shredded cheese, which is a fluorescent yellow, travels poorly, so Edward's must grate its own. The Skyline company also refuses to sell him the intentionally tasteless franks (to keep the focus on the chili) for Coneys, so he buys a local substitute. "It's complicated," Youkilis said.

Still, on a recent Cincinnati Night the crowd that spilled onto the sidewalk in front of Edward's resembled a Bengals tailgate. Nearly everyone was a Midwestern expat, and most seemed to be repeat customers; newcomers were asked where they went to high school, which is a universal greeting among Cincinnati natives and a useful proxy for determining neighborhood, class, and creed. Jennifer Sosna, Sycamore High School, Class of '03, was there with her friend Mariel Friedman, Indian Hill '05, and their boyfriends, who are not Cincinnatians but are chili converts. Friedman's date, Adam Silevitch, was momentarily struck dumb when he took a look at the menu and its photograph of a Coney, crowned with a tangle of glowing cheese. "Oh, God, yes," he said.

—*Jeffrey Toobin*

What really happened during the economic meltdown?



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DEPT. OF MEDICINE

TESTING, TESTING

The health-care bill has no master plan for curbing costs. Is that a bad thing?

BY ATUL GAWANDE

Cost is the spectre haunting health reform. For many decades, the great flaw in the American health-care system was its unconscionable gaps in coverage. Those gaps have widened to become graves—resulting in an estimated forty-five thousand premature deaths each year—and have forced more than a million people into bankruptcy. The emerging health-reform package has a master plan for this problem. By establishing insurance exchanges, mandates, and tax credits, it would guarantee that at least ninety-four per cent of Americans had decent medical coverage. This is historic, and it is necessary. But the legislation has no master plan for dealing with the problem of soaring medical costs. And this is a source of deep unease.

Health-care costs are strangling our country. Medical care now absorbs eighteen per cent of every dollar we earn. Between 1999 and 2009, the average annual premium for employer-sponsored family insurance coverage rose from $5,800 to $13,400, and the average cost per Medicare beneficiary went from $5,500 to $11,900. The costs of our dysfunctional health-care system have already helped sink our auto industry, are draining state and federal coffers, and could ultimately imperil our ability to sustain universal coverage.

What have we gained by paying more than twice as much for medical care as we did a decade ago? The health-care sector certainly employs more people and more machines than it did. But there have been no great strides in service. In Western Europe, most primary-care practices now use electronic health records and offer after-hours care; in the United States, most don't. Improvement in demonstrated medical outcomes has been modest in most fields. The reason the system is a money drain is not that it's so successful but that it's fragmented, disorganized, and inconsistent; it's neglectful of low-profit services like mental-health care, geriatrics, and primary care, and almost giddy in its overuse of high-cost technologies such as radiology imaging, brand-name drugs, and many elective procedures.

At the current rate of increase, the cost of family insurance will reach twenty-seven thousand dollars or more in a decade, taking more than a fifth of every dollar that people earn. Businesses will see their health-coverage expenses rise from ten per cent of total labor costs to seventeen per cent. Health-care spending will essentially devour all our future wage increases and economic growth. State budget costs for health care will more than double, and Medicare will run out of money in just eight years. The cost problem, people have come to realize, threatens not just our prosperity but our solvency.

So what does the reform package do about it? Turn to page 621 of the Senate version, the section entitled "Transforming the Health Care Delivery System," and start reading. Does the bill end medicine's destructive piecemeal payment system? Does it replace paying for quantity with paying for quality? Does it institute nationwide structural changes that curb costs and raise quality? It does not. Instead, what it offers is . . . pilot programs.

This has provided a soft target for critics. "Two thousand seventy-four pages and trillions of dollars later," Mitch McConnell, the Senate Minority Leader, said recently, "this bill doesn't even meet the basic goal that the American people had in mind and what they thought this debate was all about: to lower costs." According to the Congressional Budget Office, the bill makes no significant long-term cost reductions. Even Democrats have become nervous. For many, the hope of reform was to *re-form* the health-care system. If nothing is done, the United States is on track to spend an unimaginable ten trillion dollars more on health care in the next decade than it currently spends, hobbling government, growth, and employment.

Where we crave sweeping transformation, however, all the current bill offers is those pilot programs, a battery of small-scale experiments. The strategy seems hopelessly inadequate to solve a problem of this magnitude. And yet—here's the interesting thing—history suggests otherwise.

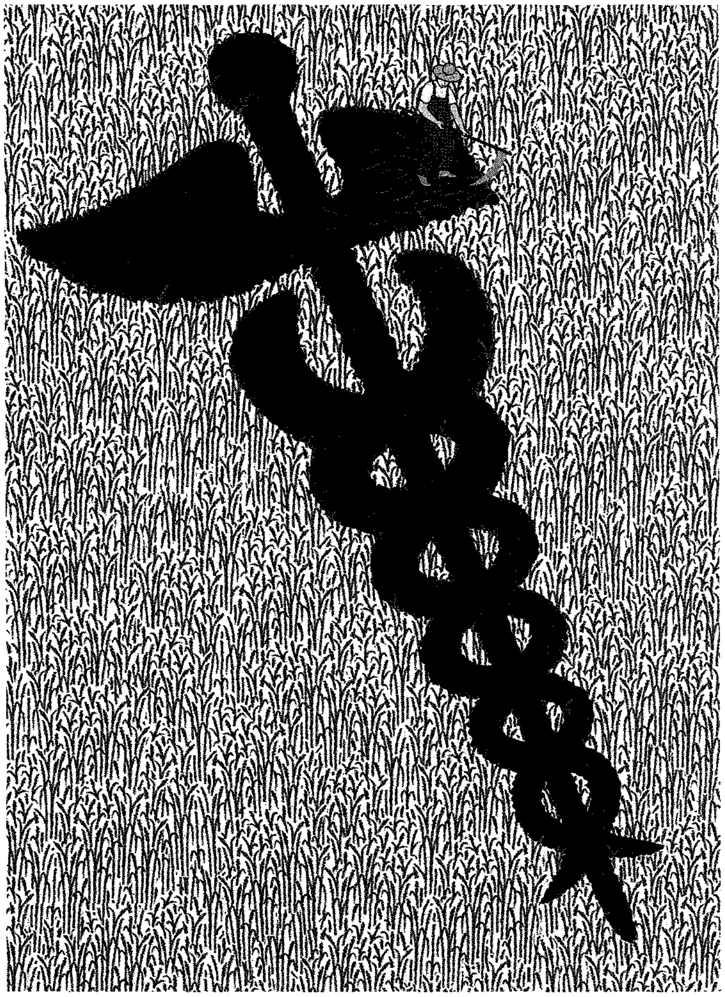
At the start of the twentieth century, another indispensable but unmanageably costly sector was strangling the country: agriculture. In 1900, more than forty per cent of a family's income went to paying for food. At the same time, farming was hugely labor-intensive, tying up almost half the American workforce. We were, partly as a result, still a poor nation. Only by improving the productivity of farming could we raise our standard of living and emerge as an industrial power. We had to reduce food costs, so that families could spend money on other goods, and resources could flow to other economic sectors. And we had to make farming less labor-dependent, so that more of the population could enter non-farming occupations and support economic growth and development.

America's agricultural crisis gave rise to deep national frustration. The inefficiency of farms meant low crop yields, high prices, limited choice, and uneven quality. The agricultural system was fragmented and disorganized, and ignored evidence showing how things could be done better. Shallow plowing, no crop rotation, inadequate seedbeds, and other habits sustained by lore and tradition resulted in poor production and soil exhaustion. And lack of coördination led to local shortages of many crops and overproduction of others.

You might think that the invisible hand of market competition would have solved these problems, that the prospect of higher income from improved practices would have encouraged change. But laissez-faire had not worked. Farmers relied so much on human muscle because it was cheap and didn't require the long-term investment that animal power and machinery did. The fact that land, too, was cheap encouraged extensive, almost careless cultivation. When the soil became exhausted, farmers simply moved; most tracts of farmland were occupied for five years or less. Those who didn't move tended to be tenant farmers, who paid rent to their landlords in either cash or crops, which also discouraged long-term investment. And there was a deep-seated fear of risk and the uncertainties of change; many farmers dismissed new ideas as "book farming."

Things were no better elsewhere in the world. For industrializing nations in the first half of the twentieth century, food was the fundamental problem. The desire for a once-and-for-all fix led Communist governments to take over and run vast "scientific" farms and collectives. We know what that led to: widespread famines and tens of millions of deaths.

The United States did not seek a grand solution. Private farms remained, along with the considerable advantages of individual initiative. Still, government was enlisted to help millions of farmers change the way they worked. The approach succeeded almost shockingly well. The resulting abundance of goods in our grocery stores and the leaps in our standard of living became the greatest argument for America around the world. And, as the agricultural historian Roy V. Scott recounted, four decades ago, in his remarkable study "The Reluctant Farmer," it all started with a pilot program.



In medicine, as in agriculture, efficiency cannot be achieved by fiat.

FRANCESCO BONGIORNI

In February, 1903, Seaman Knapp arrived in the East Texas town of Terrell to talk to the local farmers. He was what we'd today deride as a government bureaucrat; he worked for the United States Department of Agriculture. Earlier in his life, he had been a farmer himself and a professor of agriculture at Iowa State College. He had also been a pastor, a bank president, and an entrepreneur, who once brought twenty-five thousand settlers to southwest Louisiana to farm for an English company that had bought a million and a half acres of land there. Then he got a position at the U.S.D.A. as an "agricultural explorer," travelling across Asia and collecting seeds for everything from alfalfa to persimmons, not to mention a variety of rice that proved more productive than any that we'd had. The U.S.D.A. now wanted him to get farmers to farm differently. And he had an idea.

Knapp knew that the local farmers were not going to trust some outsider who told them to adopt a "better" way of doing their jobs. So he asked Terrell's leaders to find just one farmer who would be willing to try some "scientific" methods and see what happened. The group chose Walter C. Porter, and he volunteered seventy acres of land where he had grown only cotton or corn for twenty-eight years, applied no fertilizer, and almost completely depleted the humus layer. Knapp gave him a list of simple innovations to follow—things like deeper plowing and better soil preparation, the use of only the best seed, the liberal application of fertilizer, and more thorough cultivation to remove weeds and aerate the soil around the plants. The local leaders stopped by periodically to confirm that he was able to do what he had been asked to.

The year 1903 proved to be the most disastrous for cotton in a quarter century, because of the spread of the boll weevil. Nonetheless, at the end of the season Porter reported a substantial increase in profit, clearing an extra seven hundred dollars. He announced that he would apply the lessons he had learned to his entire, eight-hundred-acre property, and many other farmers did the same. Knapp had discovered a simple but critical rule for gaining coöperation: "What a man hears he may doubt, what he sees he may possibly doubt, but what he does himself he cannot doubt."

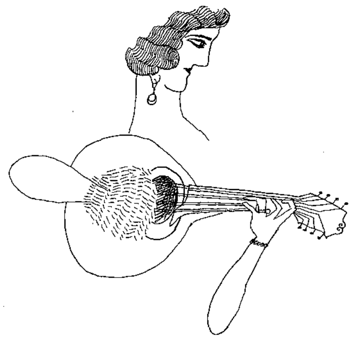
The following year, the U.S.D.A. got funding to ramp up his activities. Knapp appointed thirty-three "extension agents" to set up similar demonstration farms across Texas and into Louisiana. The agents provided farmers with technical assistance and information, including comparative data on what they and others were achieving. As experience accrued, Knapp revised and refined his list of recommended practices for an expanding range of crops and livestock. The approach proved just as successful on a larger scale.

The program had no shortage of critics. *Southern Farm Magazine* denounced it as government control of agriculture. But, in 1914, after two years of stiff opposition, Congress passed the Smith-Lever Act, establishing the U.S.D.A. Cooperative Extension Service. By 1920, there were seven thousand federal extension agents, working in almost every county in the nation, and by 1930 they had set up more than seven hundred and fifty thousand demonstration farms.

As Daniel Carpenter, a professor of government at Harvard, points out, the demonstration-farm program was just one of a hodgepodge of successful U.S.D.A. initiatives that began as pilots. Another was devoted to comparative-effectiveness research: experimental stations were established—eventually, in every state—that set about determining the most productive methods for growing plants and raising livestock. There was a pilot investigation program, which, among other things, traced a 1904 fruit-decay crisis in California to cuts in the fruit from stem clippers and the fingernails of handlers (and, along the way, introduced modern packing methods industry-wide). The U.S.D.A.'s scientific capabilities grew into the world's greatest biological-discovery machine of the time.

The department invested heavily in providing timely data to farmers, so that they could make more rational planting decisions. It ran the country's weather-forecasting system. And its statistics service adopted crop-reporting systems from Europe that allowed it to provide independent crop forecasts—forecasts that, among other things, dramatically reduced speculation bubbles. (In 1927, Republicans, prompted by aggrieved New York speculators, managed to prohibit the U.S.D.A. from releasing the forecasts; the program was reinstituted three years later, following an outcry from farmers.) The department continuously updated its storehouse of technical assistance, so that when new technologies arrived—new hybrid varieties, new kinds of fertilizer, new forms of mechanization—farmers were able to make use of them more swiftly and effectively. The U.S.D.A. established an information-broadcasting service. A hundred and seventeen commercial and forty-six military radio stations carried crop reports; printed reports were distributed to fifteen million farmers a year. It also introduced a grading system for food—meat, eggs, dairy products, and fresh fruits and vegetables—to flag and discourage substandard quality.

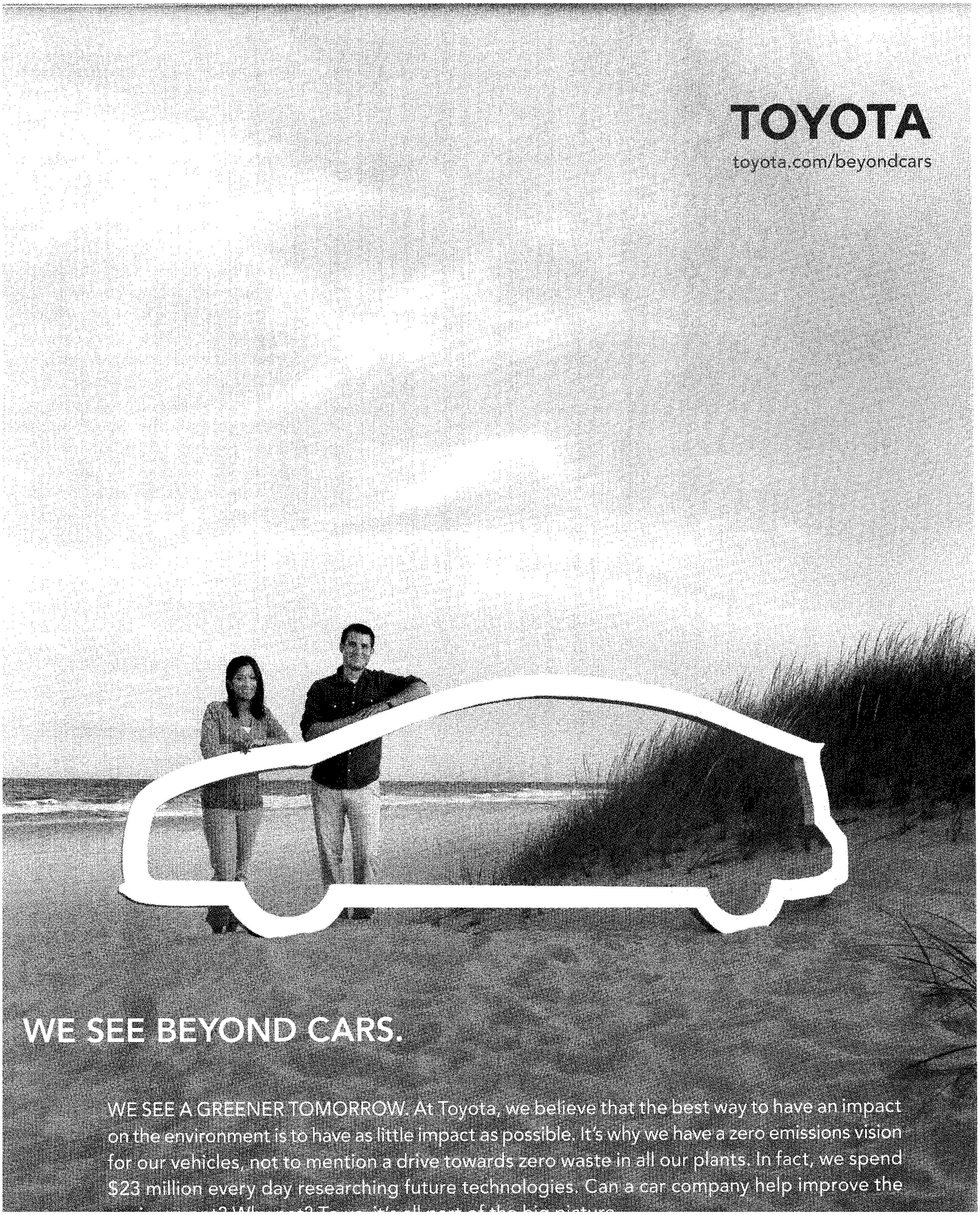
What seemed like a hodgepodge eventually cohered into a whole. The government never took over agriculture, but the government didn't leave it alone, either. It shaped a feedback loop of experiment and learning and encouragement for farmers across the country. The results were beyond what anyone could have imagined. Productivity went way up, outpacing that of other Western countries. Prices fell by half. By 1930, food absorbed just twenty-four per cent of family spending and twenty per cent of the workforce. Today, food accounts for just eight per cent of household income and two per cent of the labor force. It is produced on no more land than was devoted to it a century ago, and with far greater variety and abundance than ever before in history.



SAUL STEINBERG, FROM "THE PASSPORT" (1954)

This transformation, though critical to America's rise as a superpower, involved some painful dislocations: farms were consolidated; unproductive farmers were winnowed out. As the historian Sally Clarke, of the University of Texas at Austin, has pointed out, it's astonishing that the revolution took place without vast numbers of farm foreclosures and social unrest. We cushioned the impact of the transformation—with, for instance, price supports that smoothed out the price decline and avoided wholesale bankruptcies. There were compromises and concessions and wrong turns. But the strategy worked, because United States agencies were allowed to proceed by trial and error, continually adjusting their policies over time in response not to ideology but to hard measurement of the results against societal goals. Could something like this happen with health care?

There are, in human affairs, two kinds of problems: those which are amenable to a technical solution and those which are not. Universal health-care coverage belongs to the first category: you can pick one of several possible solutions, pass a bill, and (allowing for some tinkering around the edges) it will happen. Problems of the second kind, by contrast, are never solved, exactly; they are *managed*. Reforming the agricultural system so that it serves the country's needs has been a process, involving millions of farmers pursuing their individual interests. This could not happen by fiat. There was no one-time fix. The same goes for reforming the health-care system so that it serves the country's needs. No nation has escaped the cost problem: the expenditure curves have outpaced inflation around the world. Nobody has found a



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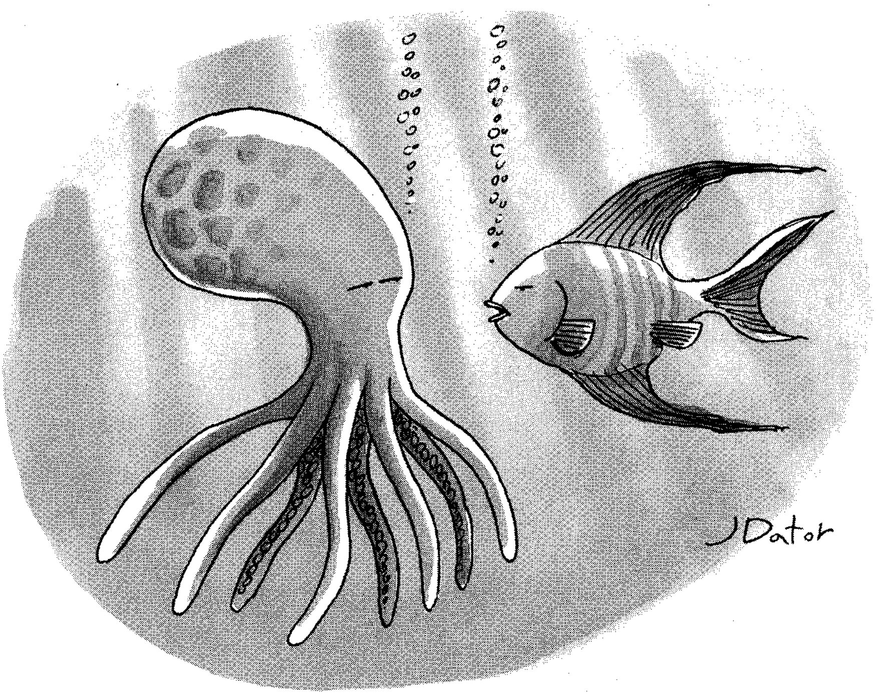


"It's not about the eight arms, Roy—it's that you keep calling them 'guns.'"

• •

master switch that you can flip to make the problem go away. If we want to start solving it, we first need to recognize that there is no technical solution.

Much like farming, medicine involves hundreds of thousands of local entities across the country—hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, home-health agencies, drug and device suppliers. They provide complex services for the thousands of diseases, conditions, and injuries that afflict us. They want to provide good care, but they also measure their success by the amount of revenue they take in, and, as each pursues its individual interests, the net result has been disastrous. Our fee-for-service system, doling out separate payments for everything and everyone involved in a patient's care, has all the wrong incentives: it rewards doing more over doing right, it increases paperwork and the duplication of efforts, and it discourages clinicians from working together for the best possible results. Knowledge diffuses too slowly. Our information systems are primitive. The malpractice system is wasteful and counterproductive. And the best way to fix all this is—well, plenty of people have plenty of ideas. It's just that nobody knows for sure.

The history of American agriculture suggests that you can have transformation without a master plan, without knowing all the answers up front. Government has a crucial role to play here—not running the system but guiding it, by looking for the best strategies and practices and finding ways to get them adopted, county by county. Transforming health care everywhere starts with transforming it somewhere. But how?

We have our models, to be sure. There are places like the Mayo Clinic, in Minnesota; Intermountain Healthcare, in Utah; the Kaiser Permanente health-care system in California; and Scott & White Healthcare, in Texas, that reliably deliver higher quality for lower costs than elsewhere. Yet they have had years to develop their organizations and institutional cultures. We don't yet know how to replicate what they do. Even they have difficulties. Kaiser Permanente has struggled to bring California-calibre results to North Carolina, for instance. Each area has its own history and traditions, its own gaps in infrastructure, and its own distinctive patient population. To figure out how to transform medical communities, with all their diversity and complexity, is going to involve trial and error. And this will require pilot programs—a lot of them.

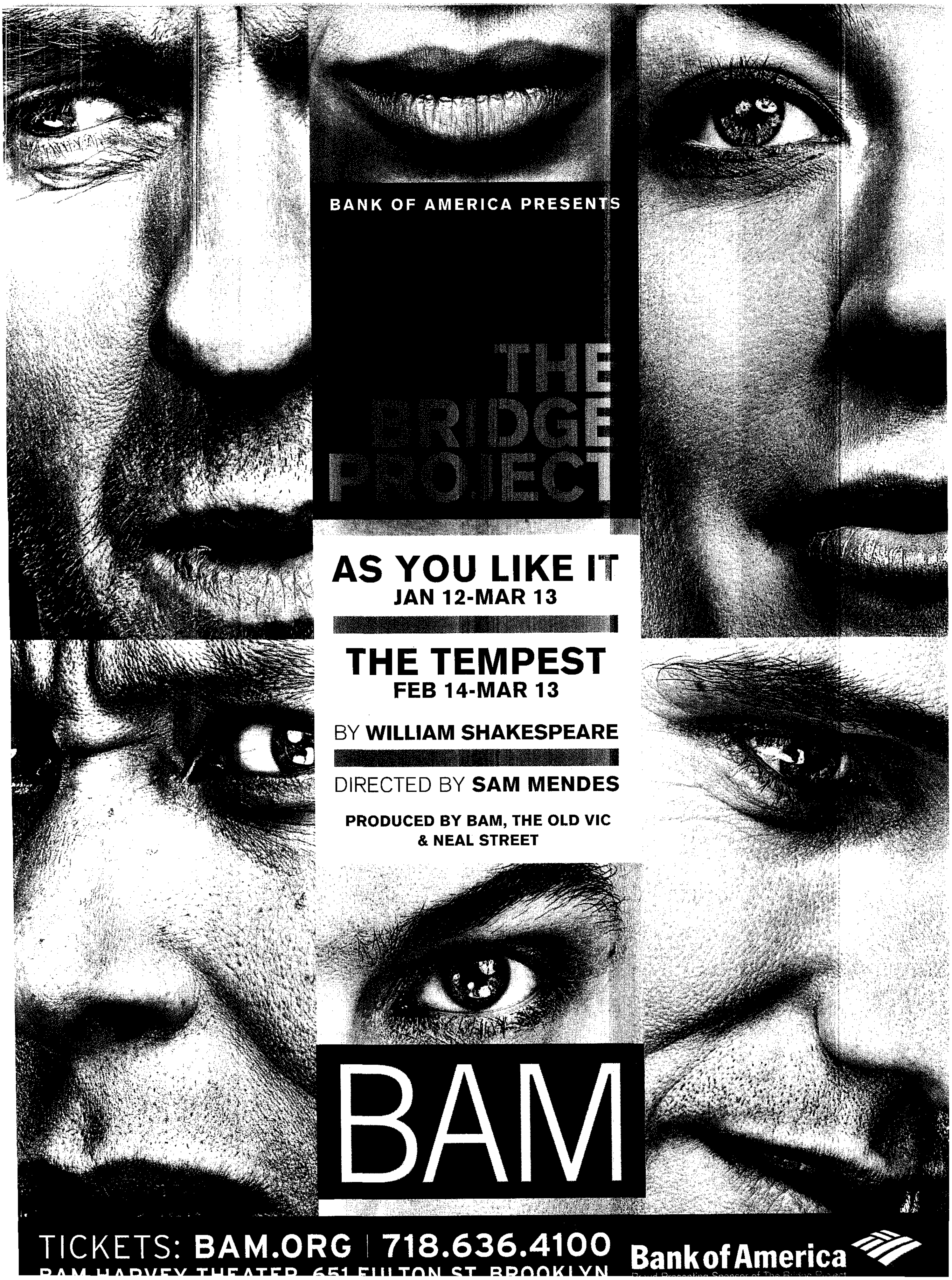
Pick up the Senate health-care bill—yes, all 2,074 pages—and leaf through it. Almost half of it is devoted to programs that would test various ways to curb costs and increase quality. The bill is a hodgepodge. And it should be.

The bill tests, for instance, a number of ways that federal insurers could pay for care. Medicare and Medicaid currently pay clinicians the same amount regardless of results. But there is a pilot program to increase payments for doctors who deliver high-quality care at lower cost, while reducing payments for those who deliver low-quality care at higher cost. There's a program that would pay bonuses to hospitals that improve patient results after heart failure, pneumonia, and surgery. There's a program that would impose financial penalties on institutions with high rates of infections transmitted by health-care workers. Still another would test a system of penalties and rewards scaled to the quality of home health and rehabilitation care.

Other experiments try moving medicine away from fee-for-service payment altogether. A bundled-payment provision would pay medical teams just one thirty-day fee for all the outpatient and inpatient services related to, say, an operation. This would give clinicians an incentive to work together to smooth care and reduce complications. One pilot would go even further, encouraging clinicians to band together into "Accountable Care Organizations" that take responsibility for all their patients' needs, including prevention—so that fewer patients need operations in the first place. These groups would be permitted to keep part of the savings they generate, as long as they meet quality and service thresholds.

The bill has ideas for changes in other parts of the system, too. Some provisions attempt to improve efficiency through administrative reforms, by, for example, requiring insurance companies to create a single standardized form for insurance reimbursement, to alleviate the clerical burden on clinicians. There are tests of various kinds of community wellness programs. The legislation also continues a stimulus-package program that funds comparative-effectiveness research—testing existing treatments for a condition against one another—because fewer treatment failures should mean lower costs.

There are hundreds of pages of these programs, almost all of which appear in the House bill as well. But the Senate re-



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form package goes a few U.S.D.A.-like steps further. It creates a center to generate innovations in paying for and organizing care. It creates an independent Medicare advisory commission, which would sort through all the pilot results and make recommendations that would automatically take effect unless Congress blocks them. It also takes a decisive step in changing how insurance companies deal with the costs of health care. In the nineteen-eighties, H.M.O.s tried to control costs by directly overruling doctors' recommendations (through requiring pre-authorization and denying payment); the backlash taught them that it was far easier to avoid sicker patients and pass along cost increases to employers. Both the House and the Senate bills prevent insurance companies from excluding patients. But the Senate plan also imposes an excise tax on the most expensive, "Cadillac" insurance plans. This pushes private insurers to make the same efforts that public insurers will make to test incentives and programs that encourage clinicians to keep costs down.

Which of these programs will work? We can't know. That's why the Congressional Budget Office doesn't credit any of them with substantial savings. The package relies on taxes and short-term payment cuts to providers in order to pay for subsidies. But, in the end, it contains a test of almost every approach that leading health-care experts have suggested. (The only one missing is malpractice reform. This is where the Republicans could be helpful.) None of this is as satisfying as a master plan. But there can't be a master plan. That's a crucial lesson of our agricultural experience. And there's another: with problems that don't have technical solutions, the struggle never ends.

Recently, I spoke with the agricultural extension agent for my home town, Athens, Ohio. His name is Rory Lewandowski. He is fifty-one and has been the extension agent there for nine years. He grew up on a Minnesota dairy farm, and got a bachelor's degree in animal science and agronomy from the University of Minnesota and a master's degree in agronomy from the University of Wisconsin. He spent most of his career in farm education, including eight years in Bolivia, where, as a volunteer for the Mennonite Central Committee, he created demonstration farms in an area where the mining economy had collapsed.

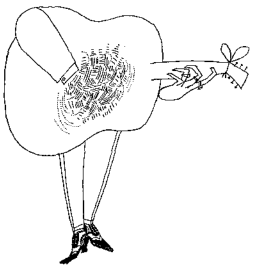
I had a vague childhood memory of the extension office, on West Union Street, near downtown Athens; kids in my school used to go to 4-H meetings there. But I had no idea what the agent really did. So I asked Lewandowski. "I just try to help make farming better in Athens County," he said.

Athens is a green, hilly county at the edge of the Appalachian Mountains, and the farms there are small—an average of a hundred and fifty acres, Lewandowski said. There are six hundred and sixty of them, with, he estimated, as many as a hundred kinds of produce and livestock. His primary task is to help farmers improve the productivity and quality of their farms and to reduce environmental harm. A hundred years after Seaman Knapp, the difficulties have changed but they haven't gone away.

I'd caught Lewandowski in his office on a Saturday. He routinely puts in sixty-five to eighty hours a week at his job. He has a five-week small-ruminant course for sheep and goat producers; a ten-week master-gardener course; and a grazing school. His wife, Marcia, who has written two knitting books, handles registration at the door. He sends out a monthly newsletter. He speaks with about half the farmers in the county in the course of a year.

Mostly, the farmers come to him—for guidance and troubleshooting. He told me about a desperate message that a farmer left him the other day. The man's spinach plants had been afflicted with downy mildew and were collapsing. "He said he was going to lose his whole crop by the weekend and all the markets that he depended on," Lewandowski said. He called the farmer back and explained that the disease gets started with cooler temperatures and high humidity. Had the farmer been using overhead watering?

Yes, he said, but he had poked around the Internet and was thinking about switching to misting.



Not a good idea. "That still leaves too much moisture on the leaf," Lewandowski said. He recommended that the farmer switch to drip irrigation, and get some fans in his greenhouse, too.

The farmer said that he'd thought about fans but worried that they would spread the spores around.

They will, Lewandowski said. "But you need wetness on the leaves for four to six hours to get penetration through the leaf cuticle," he explained. If the plants were dried out, it wouldn't be a problem. "You've got to understand the biology of this," he said to me.

He doesn't always understand the biology himself. He told me about a beef farmer who had been offered distiller's grain from a microbrewery, and wanted to know whether he could feed it to his cows. Lewandowski had no idea, but he called the program's beef extension expert and got the answer. (Yes, with some limits on how much he put in a ration.) A large organic farm called with questions about growing vegetables in high tunnels, a relatively new innovation that the farm had adopted to extend its growing season. Lewandowski had no experience with this, but an extension agent in Wooster, Ohio, was able to supply information on what had worked best elsewhere.

"You have to be able to say, 'I don't know, but I can figure that out for you,'" Lewandowski said.

If he could change one thing about farming in Athens, I asked, what would it be? "Grazing management," he said. "Think about how the grass grows in your lawn. A grass plant needs at least a few days after a mowing to grow." If you mowed your lawn every day, the grass would become thin and patchy. That's what happens when farmers leave their animals out in one big pasture—which is what most small farmers do—or rotate them too slowly. In his grazing school and in demonstrations, he asks farmers to keep their animals in a given area for only a few days, then move them to a section where the grass is eight inches tall and has reached its highest nutrient value. This way, the pastures won't erode, and the cattle will grow better, yielding higher-quality meat and more of it. The technique requires discipline, though, and extra work, and farmers have been slow to give it a try.

I DREAMED I MET WILLIAM BURROUGHS

I met William Burroughs in a dream.
It was some sort of bohemian farmhouse,
and he was enthroned, small and skeletal,
in a truly gigantic red armchair.

When I asked him how he was, he replied
Well, you know what they say—for best results,
always mock and frighten lobster before boiling.
Franz—I like that name, Franz. Childe Franz

to the dark tower something or other . . . Hey,
got a smoke? And quit worrying so much:
they can't help themselves, they're like abused dogs
and they're going to react to affection and kindness

with uncontrollable savagery. Just tell them,
You're out of my mind, pal. You're out
of my mind. Either that or, I'm out of yours.
That'll keep them brain-chained to their trees.

—*Franz Wright*

I asked him if he has had any victories. All the time, he said. But he had no illusions: his job will never end.

Cynicism about government can seem ingrained in the American character. It was, ironically, in a speech to the Future Farmers of America that President Ronald Reagan said, "The ten most dangerous words in the English language are 'Hi, I'm from the government, and I'm here to help.'" Well, Lewandowski is from the government, and he's here to help. And small farms in Athens County are surviving because of him. What he does involves continual improvisation and education; problems keep changing, and better methods of managing them keep emerging—as in medicine.

In fact, when I spoke with Lewandowski about farming in Athens, I was struck by how much it's like the health-care system there. Doctors typically work in small offices, with only a few colleagues, as in most of the country. The hospital in Athens has less than a tenth the number of beds that my hospital in Boston has. The county's clinicians could do much more to control costs and improve quality of care, and they will have to. But it will be an ongoing struggle.

My parents recently retired from medical practice in Athens. My mother was a pediatrician and my father was a urologist. I tried to imagine what it would be like for them if they were still practicing. They would be asked to switch from paper to electronic medical records, to organize with other doctors to reduce medical complications and unnecessary costs, to try to arrive at a package price for a child with asthma or a man with kidney stones. These are the kinds of changes that everyone in medicine has to start making. And I have no idea how my parents would do it.

I work in an academic medical group in Boston with more than a thousand doctors and a vastly greater infrastructure of support, and we don't know the answers to half these questions, either. Recently, I had a conversation with a few of my colleagues about whether we could accept a bundled payment for patients with thyroid cancer, one of the cancers I commonly treat in my practice as a surgeon. It seemed feasible until we started thinking about patients who wanted to get their imaging or radiation done elsewhere. There was also the matter of how we'd divide the money among the surgeons, endocrinologists, radiologists, and others involved. "Maybe we'd have to switch to salaries," someone said. Things were getting thorny. Then I went off to do an operation in which we opened up about a thousand dollars' worth of disposable materials that we never used.

Surely we can solve such problems; the reform bill sets out to find ways that we can. And, in the next several years, as the knowledge accumulates, I suspect that we'll need our own Seaman Knapps and Rory Lewandowskis to help spread these practices county by county.

We'll also need data, if we're going to know what is succeeding. Among the most important, and least noticed, provisions in the reform legislation is one in the House bill to expand our ability to collect national health statistics. The poverty of our health-care information is an embarrassment. At the end of each month, we have county-by-county data on unemployment, and we have prompt and detailed data on the price of goods and commodities; we can use these indicators to guide our economic policies. But try to look up information on your community's medical costs and utilization—or simply try to find out how many people died from heart attacks or pneumonia or surgical complications—and you will discover that the most recent data are at least three years old, if they exist at all, and aren't broken down to a county level that communities can learn from. It's like driving a car with a speedometer that tells you only how fast all cars were driving, on average, three years ago. We have better information about crops and cows than we do about patients. If health-care reform is to succeed, the final legislation must do something about this.

Getting our medical communities, town by town, to improve care and control costs isn't a task that we've asked government to take on before. But we have no choice. At this point, we can't afford any illusions: the system won't fix itself, and there's no piece of legislation that will have all the answers, either. The task will require dedicated and talented people in government agencies and in communities who recognize that the country's future depends on their sidestepping the ideological battles, encouraging local change, and following the results. But if we're willing to accept an arduous, messy, and continuous process we can come to grips with a problem even of this immensity. We've done it before. ♦

"The *New Yorker* of the 8-13 set." —*Ms.*

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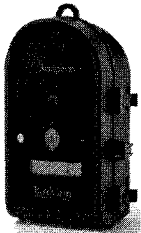
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SHOUTS & MURMURS

HANUKKAH STORIES

BY YONI BRENNER

The Last Maccabee

"Hear me, O God!" he shouted, raising his broad bronze sword. "Though you may test me, my sorrow shall be a grindstone! My suffering shall be a crucible! And I will not rest until this sanctified land is delivered into the hands of the righteous!" He beat his chest and let out a piercing war cry that struck fear into the hearts of his enemies.

Five minutes later, he was escorted out of the building by security. And although no one pressed charges, Kyle Maccabee would never work at Deloitte & Touche again.

The Visitor

On a bitterly cold night on the outskirts of Vilkovishk, Velvel the Tailor and Gronam the Milkman were playing a friendly game of dreidel, when they heard a knock at the door. Surprised, Velvel opened the door to find an old man with a long gray beard shivering in the darkness. Quickly, Velvel brought him to the fire, and served him barley soup. When the color returned to the old man's face, he noticed that the others were playing dreidel and asked if he might join them.

What followed was the greatest exhibition of dreidel that the two men—or any men—had ever seen. In less than an hour, the old man had parlayed twelve kopeks into sixty rubles, until his companions had nothing left to gamble.

Astonished, Velvel asked how it was possible for a man to have such luck.

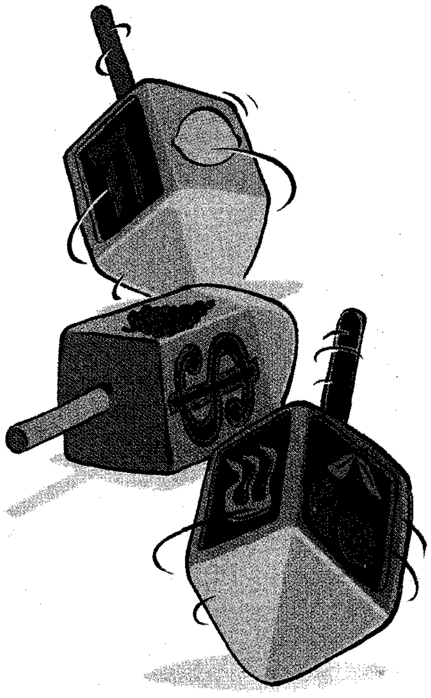
"My friends," the old man replied, "it is not luck. For I am the Prophet Elijah, come to reward your generosity with innumerable heavenly blessings."

The men rejoiced, and they kissed Elijah's hands and his cheeks. And the Prophet blessed them, and he blessed their houses and their animals; but somehow he neglected to give back the sixty rubles.

In the course of the holiday, Elijah would repeat the scam twenty-three times.

The Brightest Light

There once was a little candle named Blue. Blue lived in a box with his forty-four brothers, all of them waiting for Hanukkah, when the Boy would reach into the box and place them atop the menorah for all the world to see.



But when the first night of Hanukkah came, and the Boy reached into the box, he did not pick Blue. Nor did he pick him on the second night, or on the third. And Blue was heartbroken, for he thought he would never sit atop the menorah.

Finally, on the eighth and final night of Hanukkah, the Boy reached into the box—and whom should he

ZOHAR LAZAR

pick but Blue! And the Boy said, "Because you were so patient, I will make you the Shamash. And I will light you on fire first, and then I will use your flame to kindle the rest of your brothers."

And Blue went pale and said, "Wait—what?"

True to his word, the Boy placed Blue atop the menorah. And as Blue was slowly incinerated by his bright little flame he screamed with joy, or something.

Kangaroo Exodus

Kangaroo Moses looked out over his exiled nation. His people's eyes were weary, and their bodies bent from years of bondage. Standing upon a large rock, Kangaroo Moses raised his wooden staff and said, "Fear ye not, O Kangaroo Israel, for the Lord has promised thee salvation!" Kangaroo Moses stretched his paw over the water, and, lo and behold, a strong easterly wind came and divided the waters, and turned the water into dry land, so that Kangaroo Israel could cross. And Kangaroo Israel rejoiced! For at long last they were free.

High above the kangaroo enclosure, the zookeeper shook his head.

"Every day they do this," he muttered. "Every fucking day."

Ringo's Wish

"What's the matter, Ringo?" John said, handing him a handkerchief.

Ringo blew his nose. "It's already the fourth night of Hanukkah," he sniffled, "and I haven't got a single present."

"Well, that won't do," John said, and he set off to tell the rest of the Beatles.

"A present?" Paul said. "Well, I suppose I could give him this banana."

"A present?" George said. "I suppose I could give him this zipper."

Then John took a Mason jar and filled it with dirt. "My present is dirt," John said.

That night, the Beatles threw a tremendous Hanukkah party in Ringo's honor. Ringo was overwhelmed. He had never imagined that Hanukkah could be so fun, or so rewarding—especially since he had learned of its existence only that morning.

Incidentally, it was around this time that the Beatles were doing a lot of drugs.

Latkeland

In the Book of the Redemption (c. 1263), the celebrated medieval Jewish philosopher Nahmanides describes a distant land where everything—the houses, the roads, even the synagogue—is made from potato latkes. And running through this savory land are two broad rivers, one flowing with applesauce and the other with sour cream. And on Hanukkah the Jews of Latkeland gather at the confluence of the two rivers, so they can top their latkes with a dollop of each.

Incidentally, it was around this time that Nahmanides was doing a lot of drugs.

The Judgment of Velvel

Standing at the Gates of Eden, Velvel the Tailor watched with apprehension as the Angel weighed his sins and virtues upon the Scales of Justice. And although Velvel had been honest in his business dealings and had recited the Shema every night, his penny-pinching, along with his habit of stuffing his neighbors' mezuzahs with scrolls of prosciutto, had tipped the balance against him.

Just as the Angel was about to cast him below, Velvel remembered the night when Elijah had come to his house in the guise of an old man, and fleeced him at dreidel.

And so, hearing the tale, the Angel called on Elijah, and Elijah appeared before them.

"It is true," Elijah said, corroborating the story. "It was a cold night, and Velvel showed me great hospitality." Then Elijah mounted the Scales of Justice, and tipped the balance toward righteousness.

Suddenly, a twenty-person SWAT team appeared and surrounded Elijah. Within seconds, the Prophet was under arrest, charged with eighty-nine counts of fraud.

The Angel shook Velvel's hand. "Thanks for your coöperation," he said. "We've been trying to nail this guy for years."

"Glad to help," Velvel said, removing his wire. "Now, how do I get back to earth?"

The Angel shifted awkwardly, and said, "Well, you're still dead." ♦

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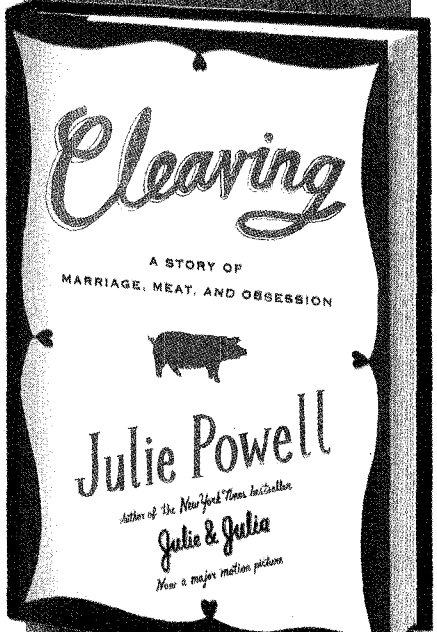
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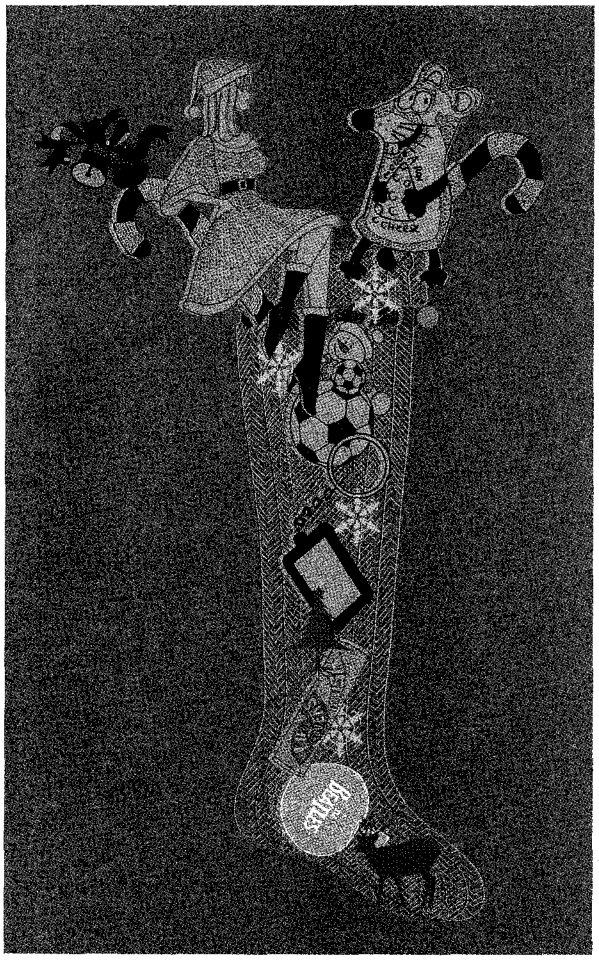
ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

PUT IT IN A SOCK

Plenty of ways to stuff a stocking.

BY PATRICIA MARX

Stocking stuffers are the *amuses-bouches* of Christmas. These tiny tchotchkes tucked inside nailed-up hosiery are the preamble to the main course—toys that require midnight assembly, itty-bitty electronics that come in inexplicably large boxes, furry things that aren't housebroken. "My parents used stockings as part of an appeasement strategy on Christmas Eve," one friend told me. Each gift in a stocking is, of course, small, but it can be *big* small: like the check for a thousand dollars that one sixth grader got from her new stepfather. Stocking stuffers can also be *small* small—useless gag gifts that one friend calls "landfill," such as musk-flavored Life Savers (aussiecatalog.com, $1.95) and a Grow Your Own Catnip kit (cattoys.com; $1.99). Or, even worse, they can be *petty* small (dental-appointment-reminder cards). A director friend e-mailed, "I hate stockings. As if Christmas weren't horrible and stressful enough, you also have to think of gifts that will fit in a sock."



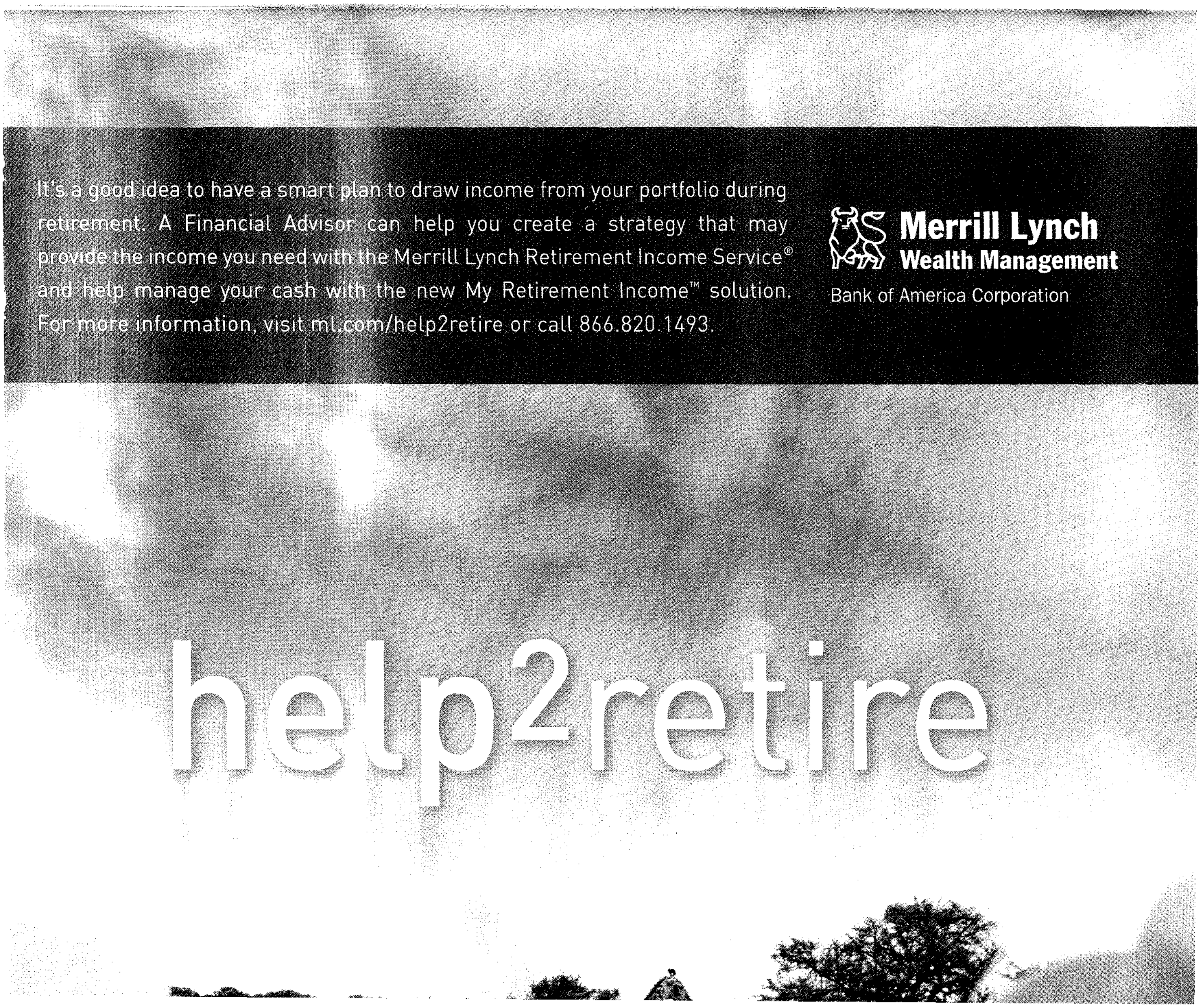
A stocking should be all prizes and no crackerjacks.

HIROSHI TANABE

Why a sock? Why not a mitten? Or a lunchbox or a sleeping bag? If you like legends for answers, you are in luck. One has it that years ago—some peg it to the fourth century—the bishop St. Nicholas of Myra (now in Turkey) sneaked into the house of three poor maidens who had no dowries, and, while the sisters were sleeping, placed gold coins in the socks they'd hung to dry over the fireplace. Today, as a stand-in for the gold, we use oranges, although who wouldn't rather have gold ($1,213 per ounce)? Another explanation involves sixteenth-century Dutch children and their clogs. I know of no legend that implicates the sock that disappears in the laundry, but this AWOL matter can be easily redressed by LittleMissMatched (565 Fifth Avenue, at 46th), a firm that sells whimsically patterned socks (and gloves) in sets of three. Put aside one of the double-cuff kneesocks in the trio as a receptacle to contain the remaining two ($16 for a three-pack). Or remember: 'tis the season to exhaust an unconscionable number of batteries, and, toward this end, Brookstone (brookstone.com) makes an L.E.D.-lit stocking in burgundy velvet and lace ($24.95, reduced to $9.99).

A Christmas stocking should be all prizes, no crackerjacks. "I'll tell you what I don't want for Christmas," my niece told me when she was twelve. "Underwear, because what's the point?" Is there anyone, however, who wouldn't cherish a pair of tiny Squirrel Underpants? According to the package copy, a portion of the sales profits will be donated to the Small Animal Decency Fund, dedicated to eliminating nudity among animals (E.A.T. Gifts, 1062 Madison Avenue, at 80th; $8.50). Sabrina Sablosky, age eleven, would not like wool socks or a fire extinguisher for Christmas. Nor does she hanker for any of the stuffed creatures that she and I encountered on a stroll through F.A.O. Schwarz ("They're really too babyish, plus I already have a lot of them"), with the possible exception of an Uglydoll keychain, because it's so fun to squish ($6.99). What Sabrina would like most of all is an unlimited-texting plan for her cell phone, but she assured me that her mother will not be surprising her with this. Sabrina would settle for dangling earrings ($7.50) from Claire's (1385 Broadway, at 38th) and some sweets from Dylan's Candy Bar (1011 Third Avenue, at 60th)—specifically, the three-foot-long Big Fat Hissie Fit Gummy Snake ($6), the jar of invisible pills ($4.50), and the gingerbread-cookie-decorating kit, which comes with eight cookies and two markers ($10).

Question: If you brush your teeth with toothpaste infused with cola, bitter chocolate, pumpkin pudding, California orange, or any of the eighteen other flavors made by Breath Palette, does it count as dental hygiene? Apparently so (breathpalette.com; $4.49 per tube). The same goes for dental floss flavored with essence of cupcake, salad, or bacon (E.A.T.; $6). Other throwaways for kids that will not get immediately thrown away: Silly Straw, five pieces of clear connectable straw tubing that allow you to snake coursing streams of beverage around your head (E.A.T.; $6); Glow Graffiti, an aerosol can of ultraviolet-light-sensitive paint that fluoresces on any surface, so that young Keith Harings can create evanescent pictures in the dark (Spring Design and Art, 126A Front Street, Brooklyn; spring3d.net; $60); an iPod-size mechanical kit that allows you to play melodies you compose yourself on a crank music box (D.I.Y.



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music-box set, kikkerland.com; $15); Tic Tac Toast, a plastic branding stamp that embosses a slice of bread with a tic-tac-toe grid, because isn't breakfast boring? (perpetualkid.com; $3.99); an ice tray that makes fossil-shaped cubes (Broadway Panhandler, 65 East 8th Street; $7.95); any of the On-the-Go Science kits, such as the "Forensic Science Detective" model, which instructs a child how to identify fingerprints and analyze a crime scene, so that she can construct an airtight case against her brother (amazon.com; $5.99); the mesmerizing Neo-Cube puzzle, two hundred and twenty-four magnetic balls that can be arranged in endless combinations ($24.95, at theneocube.com; not for households with magnet-munching toddlers); and that enduring ovum of ecstasy a Silly Putty egg (State News, 112 East 86th Street; $2.25).

Theatre tickets are a dandy gift for anyone, but be prepared if your eleven-year-old asks how Santa Claus has found out that "Billy Elliot" is at the Imperial Theatre. One mother I know gently explained that Telecharge is a toll-free number, callable even from the North Pole (800-432-7250; $41.50-$136.50, plus usurious handling fees).

You've got to hand it to Santa. Most celebrities hire trainers and stylists to make them look more like celebrities, but the dumpy, bearded guy in the red suit still looks like a "before" picture. In reality, though, he is an "after" picture. St. Nicholas was originally depicted as a sterner gentleman, tall and thin, sometimes in a dark canonical robe. Washington Irving is usually credited with performing Santa's first makeover. In Irving's 1809 satire, "Knickerbocker's History of New York," he described Santa Claus, named after the Dutch Sinter Klaas, as an old burgher, who wore a broad-brimmed hat and a pair of Flemish hose and smoked a long pipe. Irving's saint cruised in a flying wagon over the rooftops, occasionally reaching into his pockets for presents, which he'd deposit in the chimneys of the children he liked best. Several years later, in 1823, Clement Moore's poem "'Twas the Night Before Christmas" turned Santa into a lovable, laughing fatty, though he was technically an elf. These days, you can be (or turn a loved one into) any kind of Santa you like—a Thomas Nast Victorian model, a tropical Santa in fur shorts, or a "Sexy Plus Size Santa's Sweetie," but is this really how you want to spend your holiday? (Santaplanet.com has Santa, Mrs. Claus, and Elf suits from $25.99 to $528.99; a carolling hand bell, $12.99; adult fleece elf shoes, $17.99; small pointy ears, on sale for $4.99.)

Can I interest you in a four-story red brick town house on the Upper East Side, asking price only $2,200? The diminutive dwelling, for sale at the Tiny Doll House (314 East 78th Street), may be too big (twenty by twenty-eight by forty-eight inches) for all but a Brobdingnagian's stocking, but most of the other wares in the shop would be just right. This establishment has the biggest selection of shrimpy furniture in the tristate area, according to the owner, Leslie Edelman. There are tiny wicker chairs, guitars in velvet-lined cases, easels displaying works-in-progress, Tiffany & Co. shopping bags, stacks of pancakes, old-fashioned gumball machines ("They're hot these days," Edelman said), microscopic tubes of Crest, and grand pianos, which some clients have bought to give as an I.O.U. for a real piano ($22.50, $15, $12, $6, $10, $4.50, $2.50, $15).

Claude Lévi-Strauss believed that the appeal of a miniature has to do with its being a scaled-down replica, and therefore easier to grasp than the big, messy totality:

> To understand a real object in its totality we always tend to work from its parts. The resistance it offers us is overcome by dividing it. Reduction in scale reverses this situation. Being smaller, the object as a whole seems less formidable. By being quantitatively diminished, it seems to us qualitatively simplified. More exactly, this quantitative transposition extends and diversifies our power over a homologue of the thing, and by means of it the latter can be grasped, assessed, and apprehended at a glance

is part of what Levi-Strauss wrote, proving that his case applies to paragraphs, too.

Don't you want to adopt that adorable hinged box carved in 1920 from a single hazelnut shell, along with the teensy-weensy knife that fits inside it (Cooper-Hewitt; $100)? How come a baby flashlight is so gosh-darn cute, whereas a standard model, placed side by side, looks, well, oafish (L.E.D. flashlight on a keychain, goldengadgets.com; $5.99)? Could it be that we like miniatures objects because, unlike, say, your puppy or baby, they will never grow up. Warning: The cute li'l bantam cactus for sale at Ariston Floral Boutique (425 Lexington Avenue, at 44th) can survive in your stocking for about a week, and after a few years you'll be able to use it as a Santa Fe-style Christmas tree ($3).

Electronics keep getting more and more micro. (Let's leave TVs out of this, O.K.?) The must-have-but-impossible-to-get choking hazard of the moment is the fuzzy, battery-powered Zhu Zhu hamster, which scoots here and there while making noises that mimic a yawn, a purr, a chirp, and a flushing toilet. "I would rather have a real-life hamster or a dog," Sophie Sonnenfeld, age seven, told me, explaining that she thought the toy looked too much like a pencil sharpener. The manufacturer recommends this item for children three and up, but, honestly, I think it's for cats three and under (available for $8 at Wal-Mart, although the appropriately named Toys Gone Wild is selling it for $74.99).

Lonely? Tengu will be your B.F.F. The sweet little white plastic brick plugs into a U.S.B. port and responds to your voice by moving its red L.E.D. facial features, as if lip-synching (perpetualkid.com; $34.99). A fingertip-size speaker from usbfever.com can turn your MP3 player into a public nuisance ($9.99). On the other hand, just because everyone is grooving on Alvin and the Chipmunks doesn't mean you have to. Klipsch IMAGE S4 headphones are comfortable, produce full-range sound, and aren't too pricey (amazon.com; $79.99). And, say, haven't you always wanted to perform medical examinations on yourself while reading your e-mail? The two-foot-long U.S.B. endoscope with a thirty-two-inch cable can make this dream come horribly true (usbfever.com; $104.99).

Did you know that there are miniature books about miniature books? For instance, "Many Littles Make a Much," whose title is taken from a line in "Don Quixote" (Miniature Book Society, mbs.org; $25, in gold cloth or red leather). There are miniature books for children, such as the delightful Nutshell Library, by Maurice Sendak (amazon.com; $12.20 for the boxed set). And there are collectible miniature books with unminiature price tags: an 1863 copy of the

Emancipation Proclamation, the first and only contemporary printing of the document in book form (Bromer Booksellers, 607 Boylston Street, Boston; $22,500). The most comprehensive treatment of the subject, however, is the gloriously illustrated "Miniature Books: 4,000 Years of Tiny Treasures," in which you will learn that Napoleon carried a collection of miniature volumes with him on his military campaigns; that the smallest type in the world is called "fly's eye"; and that a German biomedical firm published a two-and-a-half-inch-by-two-and-three-eighths-inch, four-hundred-and-four-page book in 1991 that contained an actual pacemaker. "Miniature Books" is a coffee-table volume but was once issued in midget size for collectors (amazon.com; $27.23).

Those who take pleasure in blowing people's minds will appreciate a copy of "The Expert Bible," a gilt-edged breast-pocket-size version of "The Expert at the Card Table," the treatise revered and loathed among card conjurers for exposing many of the secrets of their craft (conjuringarts.com; $15). The book was written pseudonymously in 1901 by a magician who feared the consequences of his reveal. English majors might go for a deck of Shakespearean insult cards, a different zinger on each one (shakespearesden.com; $7.95). And even the most masterly card hustler might be foiled by a deck of Invisible Cards. The transparent set comes in a glow-in-the-dark version, too (kikkerland.com; $9 and $11).

Are all these nano-gifts causing you eyestrain? For the presbyopic, the handsome magnifying glass available at Cursive, a nook of a gift shop in Grand Central Terminal, is on a wheeled tripod and can be adjusted up and down, depending on your age—um, I mean, your height ($45). Whatever your visual acuity, you will be charmed, then irritated, by birdcalls made in France of wood, rubber, and brass. They come in sparrow, blackbird, chickadee, sandpiper, robin, a murmuration of starlings, and more ($52-$80). At the Art of Shaving (373 Madison Avenue, at 46th), there are badger-hair brushes that range in price from $55 to $1,200, to suit every level of affectation. Blue Tree (1283 Madison Avenue, at 92nd), a mini department store full of treasures for that friend who's impossible to buy presents for, has lovely pewter paperweights in an assortment of snack-food styles, ranging from saltine to ice-cream sandwich ($12 to $55). You could gather everything at Issey Miyake (802 Madison Avenue, at 68th)—the miles and miles of stretchy pleated clothing—scrunch it up into a ball, and fit it into the fist-size reversible reticule that looks like a bunch of aqua and teal grapes ($95). There might even be space left over for the winsome mouse-size mouse pouch with patent-leather ears and rivet eyes, at M Z Wallace (93 Crosby Street; $45).

At Muji (620 Eighth Avenue, at 40th, and other locations), T-shirts come compressed into shrink-wrapped pellets smaller than a can of Spam, which can be sprung open should the urge for a wrinkled jersey suddenly overcome you

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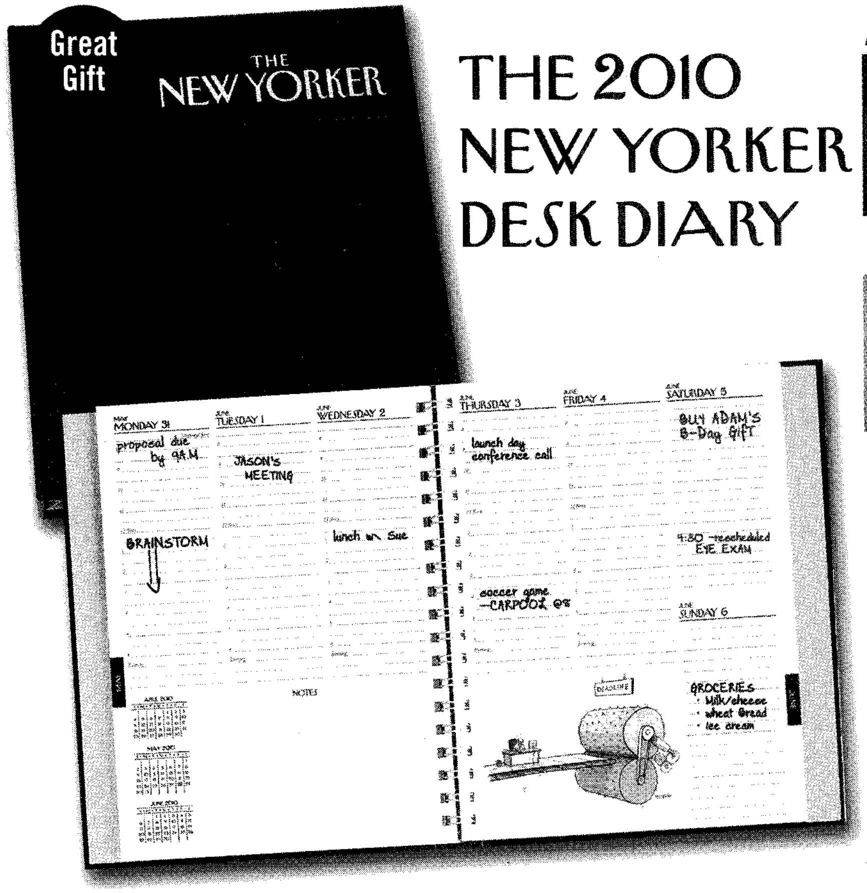

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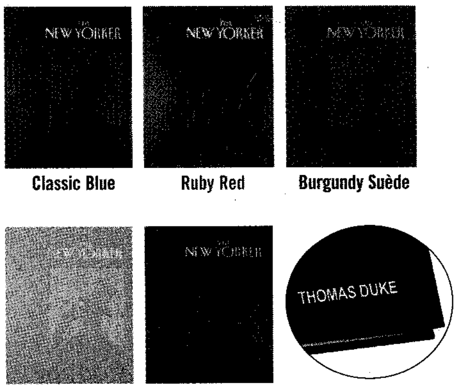

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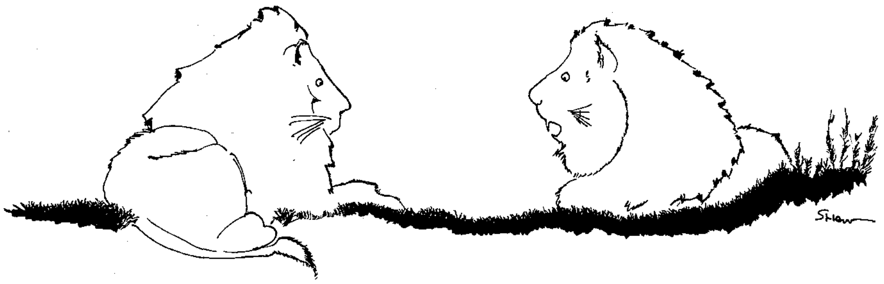

"I'm trying to eat more vegetarians."

($12.95). The booty at Shanghai Tang (600 Madison Avenue, at 58th) comes in such vibrant non-black hues you'll think you're no longer in Manhattan. There are leather eyeglass holders in orange and chartreuse, compact mirrors with fuchsia enamelled decoration, leather luggage tags with cutout red stars, and silver wine stoppers topped with lions, dragons, and pagodas on a hill ($30, $95, $45, $65). Zitomer (969 Madison Avenue, at 78th) has paper shampoo (thin, dry sheets of soap to which you add water) and rubber caps to put on the tips of your highest heels to protect them from mud, cobblestones, and other footwear perils ($7.50 and $11.95).

New York City must surely be St. Nick's favorite stopover. A dearth of chimneys here means fewer Santas roasting on an open fire. An ingeniously cool alternative to this fire hazard is an electric fireplace insert that uses quasi-holographic projection to evoke surprisingly realistic-looking flames. Install the apparatus in a wall recess, shower stall, microwave, or any place you'd like the family to gather round and build memories. And, of course, you can hang your stockings over it (Dimplex twenty-three-inch fireplace insert, electricfireplacesource.com; $199).

Jesse Helms, Heath Ledger, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Yves Saint Laurent, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and Charlton Heston wouldn't be caught dead together, but they are doing just that downtown at Moss (150 Greene Street), where finger puppets of these personages, all of whom died in 2008, rest in peace in a six-pocket pouch ($75 for the "Gone but Not Forgotten" set). The handmade sterling-silver wallet pen, small enough to clip onto the crease of your wallet or checkbook, looks more expensive than it is, and isn't that what you're always after when you choose a gift? (Joon, 795 Lexington Avenue, at 62nd, or thewalletpen.com; $40.50, $9.50 extra for engraving).

The people behind Kiosk (95 Spring Street), a funky, highly curated boutique in SoHo, travel the globe, rummaging through hardware stores, street markets, and pharmacies so that you can buy neato everyday items from foreign places without getting jet lag. The store, up two flights of dimly lit stairs, is currently featuring items from Kiosk's excursion to Portugal, including a glazed faience toothpick holder in the shape of a goat ($65) and a retro-looking aluminum-and-Bakelite children's tea set ($33). There are items available from past excursions, too: the plastic figurines depicting a dour Finnish man and woman were made to bedeck a confirmation cake, but they'd work well on the wedding cake of a couple least likely to succeed ($18). A Japanese sesame grinder could, I bet, mash the hell out of even the most obstreperous sesame seed ($9). A niftily boxed stainless steel "clam ram" from Connecticut I want, if only for the name ($24). There's a Swedish mushroom knife made of reindeer horn, a papier-mâché surprise ball from Mexico that contains fifteen vintage trinkets, bubble solution in a tiny plastic bag from Germany (wand included), and, from Missouri, genuine U.S. half dollars that have been hollowed out to resemble the coins used by C.I.A. spies to hide secret messages and film ($80, $45, $2, $65, $36).

If you're struck with wanderlust, take a voyage to the vast gift center at the United Nations (First Avenue at 46th Street), where you can pick up curios from countries you can't exactly place on a map. Of note are delicate malachite sailboats from Congo, ceramic jars from Latvia, and smart-looking metal candlesticks from Denmark in the shape of a squashed S ($71.99, $32.99, $22.99).

"My daddy came from Lebanon seventy years ago, and started this shop," Andrew Terzis, the genial proprietor of the Persian Shop (534 Madison Avenue, at 54th), told me. This homey spot in midtown specializes in European and Middle Eastern jewelry, furniture, and exotica. "He needed a name for the shop, so he picked an empire," Terzis went on, showing me a case of hand-tooled silver Russian Orthodox icons ($150-$600). What else is here? Beautiful Lebanese letter openers for $45, made from camel bone trimmed with coral, turquoise, and lapis and inlaid with silver and brass ("I found an extra box, so I can afford to be generous"), and cloisonné figurines of a snake sitting on the shell of a turtle ("showing basically that adversaries can be friends").

"Our Santa has variously been on a diet or is lactose-intolerant," said a lawyer friend who has contrived excuses on more than one occasion to explain to her daughter why the cookies and milk that her daughter had left out for Santa on Christmas Eve remained untouched the next morning. Kris Kringle's dietary quirks aside, Christmas stockings can be a cornucopia of edibles. Bond Street Chocolate (63 East 4th Street), which, as I discovered the hard way, is not on Bond Street, makes delicious chocolate figurines of Buddha, Jesus, Ganesh, and the Virgin of Guadalupe, all divinities sprinkled with gold-leaf powder ($10-$20). L. A. Burdick (5 East 20th Street) turns out darling little dark-chocolate, milk-chocolate, and white-chocolate mice and penguins, with chocolate-ganache integuments, almond appendages, and guts of mocha, orange, and cinnamon ($2.50-$3 for one). If you lose a crown while devouring a Fleur de Sel caramel, it would still be worth it (at dasfoods.com, in six flavors, including chocolate walnut and chili pecan; $6.99 for a four-ounce box). Dissolvable sugar spoons in an assortment of pastels are perfect for the sweet tooth hoping to keep cleanup to a minimum (Tea and Honey Store, Grand Central Terminal; $20 for twelve). The boiled cider from

Wood's Cider Mill is great for making pies, applesauce, and barbecue marinade, but it's concentrated seven to one, so be careful with the Jell-O shots (woodscidermill.com; $7.50 for a pretty pint bottle). Kalustyan's (123 Lexington Avenue, at 28th), the exotic specialty supermarket in Little India, could be considered a two-story Christmas stocking for cooks. You can pick up a vial of saffron, always welcome ($14.99 for a one-gram tube), but there are also a hundred and thirty-nine kinds of salt (black lava sea salt; $12.99 for eight ounces), a hundred and eighty kinds of tea (honey-pear tea with pollen pieces; $20.99 for a four-ounce can), thirty kinds of chili (world's hottest chili; $2.99 for 1.5 ounces), three kinds of pomegranate molasses ($9.99 for ten ounces), sorrel flowers ($4.99 for two ounces), organic black quinoa ($7.99 for fourteen ounces), urfa bibber ($5.99 for 2.25 ounces), tins of sprats ($6.99), and jaggery ($6.99 a pound). But, sorry, the store doesn't carry inflatable fruitcake (inflatablefuitcake.com; $9.50).

Some Jews do and some Jews don't. "Once, I accidentally put Hanukkah gelt into my son's stocking instead of regular chocolate gold coins, so I told him that Santa had a little Alzheimer's that year," said a woman who wished to remain anonymous lest word get back to her son that Santa Claus is not only losing it but doesn't exist. Dreidels? The Jewish Museum gift shop is a dreidelarama. There are dreidels that bounce, light up, sing songs, hold bubbles, and sit on filigreed pedestals, but my favorite is the slinky dreidel ($3 for the slinky; others $0.50-$1,550).

Oy vey. Christmas is to Bronner's CHRISTmas Wonderland (the company's capitalization) what red wine is to a headache that lasts three hundred and sixty-one days a year (25 Christmas Lane, Frankenmuth, a.k.a. Little Bavaria, Michigan; bronners.com). Bronner's, which calls itself the largest Christmas store in the world, is housed in an Alpine-style building that's the size of five and a half football fields. This temple of Yuletide retail, which receives more than two million visitors a year, carries six thousand varieties of ornaments, a hundred and fifty styles of nutcracker, and three hundred and fifty Precious Moments figurines. If the light sets sold in one year at Bronner's were stretched out along a highway, they would reach halfway from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, to Christmas, Florida. Bronner's is the place to find an ornament that reads "Chiropractors have well-adjusted patients!" and, to accessorize your Nativity scene, a plastic palm tree with faux-moss base ($8.99 and $19.99).

Inside the Goldman Sachs Bonus Stocking: an alligator-skin single cigar holder (Asprey, 853 Madison Avenue, at 71st; $675); a chunky silver belt buckle cast to look like a castle (Kieselstein-Cord, 1058 Madison Avenue, at 80th; $1,250); a Swarovski crystal-and-diamond fountain pen (Alfred Dunhill, 545 Madison Avenue, at 55th; $5,270); a U.S.B. stick containing a colossal library of Beatles music, film, and photographs (fanfire.com; $279.99); a pocket-size red-wine rater (Hermès, 691 Madison Avenue, at 62nd; $610), the Hope Diamond (Smithsonian Museum; how big did you say your bonus was?); and a stunning silver money clip engraved with the message "Philanthropy Is Beautiful," and no, we're not talking government bailout (Joan Hornig jewelry at Bergdorf Goodman; $55).

Fine. Give your pet a Christmas stocking, but, I'm telling you, you're never ever going to get one in return. If you insist on flaunting your unconditional love, a pet boutique called Trixie + Peanut (23 East 20th Street) has Chewy Vuitton handbags, Ruff Lauren Aftershave stuffed toys, and Nail Pawlish in Fire Hydrant Red, Doghouse Blue, and Mutts New Purple ($12, $15, $10). Petco has Yip Yap dog mints (petco.com; $2.97). Buttercup's Paw-tisserie (63 Fifth Avenue, Brooklyn) has holiday-themed natural dog cookies and candies that look humanly delicious (starting at $3.50). For cats who don't mind sparing their dignity, Petco carries holiday antlers and also mouse toys, mouse toys, mouse toys ($3.99, $1.97, and up). Birds, how about a candy-cane piñata? And I know you love Poop-Off (drsfostersmith.com; $4.99, $7.99, $8.99). Of course, all animals appreciate cash (or, if you think that's tacky, a gift card)—except for fish, who refuse to celebrate the holidays. ♦

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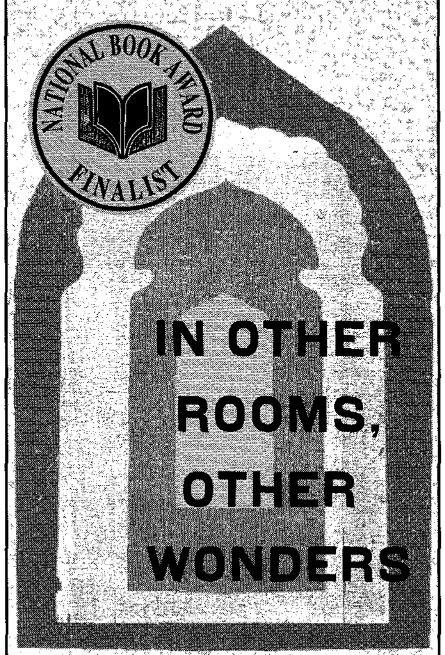

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ANNALS OF LAW

THE CELEBRITY DEFENSE

Sex, fame, and the case of Roman Polanski.

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

On the morning of March 11, 1977, Detective Philip Vannatter, of the Los Angeles Police Department, arrived at his desk in the West L.A. division to find a report that had been placed there a few hours earlier. The document recounted how patrol officers had gone to the home of Samantha Gailey, a thirteen-year-old girl who lived in the San Fernando Valley, after her mother called police to say that Samantha had been raped by Roman Polanski, the movie director, who was forty-four at the time.

"In those days, I was too busy raising kids and paying bills to go to many movies," Vannatter recalled recently. "But of course I knew who Polanski was, because of Sharon Tate." Seven and a half years earlier, Tate, who was married to Polanski, and four other people were killed at the couple's home, in Benedict Canyon, by members of Charles Manson's "family."

Vannatter read the file and went to interview Gailey and her mother, reported on his findings to prosecutors in the district attorney's office, and then took the girl and the mother to speak to the lawyers themselves. According to Vannatter, "The prosecutor decided that we should go to the hotel where Polanski was staying and execute a search warrant"—to find, among other things, photographs of Gailey that she said Polanski had taken and quaalude pills like the one she said the director had given her. "The head of the D.A.'s office there told me to do the search but not to arrest him," Vannatter recalled. "They said they didn't want to do an arrest, but to do the case more slowly, through a grand-jury investigation. I was very unhappy when I heard about that. I thought we had plenty of evidence to arrest him, and that's what I thought we should do."

So, in the early evening, Vannatter and his partner went to the Beverly Wilshire hotel, in Beverly Hills, where Polanski was staying. "As we were walking through the lobby, I saw Polanski getting out of the elevator," Vannatter said. "I walked up to him and placed him under arrest. I thought, The heck with this. I wasn't going to let those D.A.s tell me how to do my job. Why not arrest the guy? Any other person would have been arrested. So I said I'm going to do what is right.

"After I read him his rights, I asked him to take me upstairs to his room, so I could do the search," Vannatter went on. "I noticed that he had something in his hand, and he was just about to drop it. So I put my hand under his and said, 'Why don't you drop it into my hand instead of on the floor?'" Polanski placed a single quaalude in Vannatter's palm.

In Suite 200, Polanski was jittery but coöperative. "As we say on the farm, he was nervous as a hen on a hot rock. He kept asking me for the quaalude back, so he could take it and calm down," Vannatter said. "By the time we got back to the station house, he told me he had had sex with her." (The question of exactly when Polanski first admitted having sex with Gailey is a matter of dispute.)

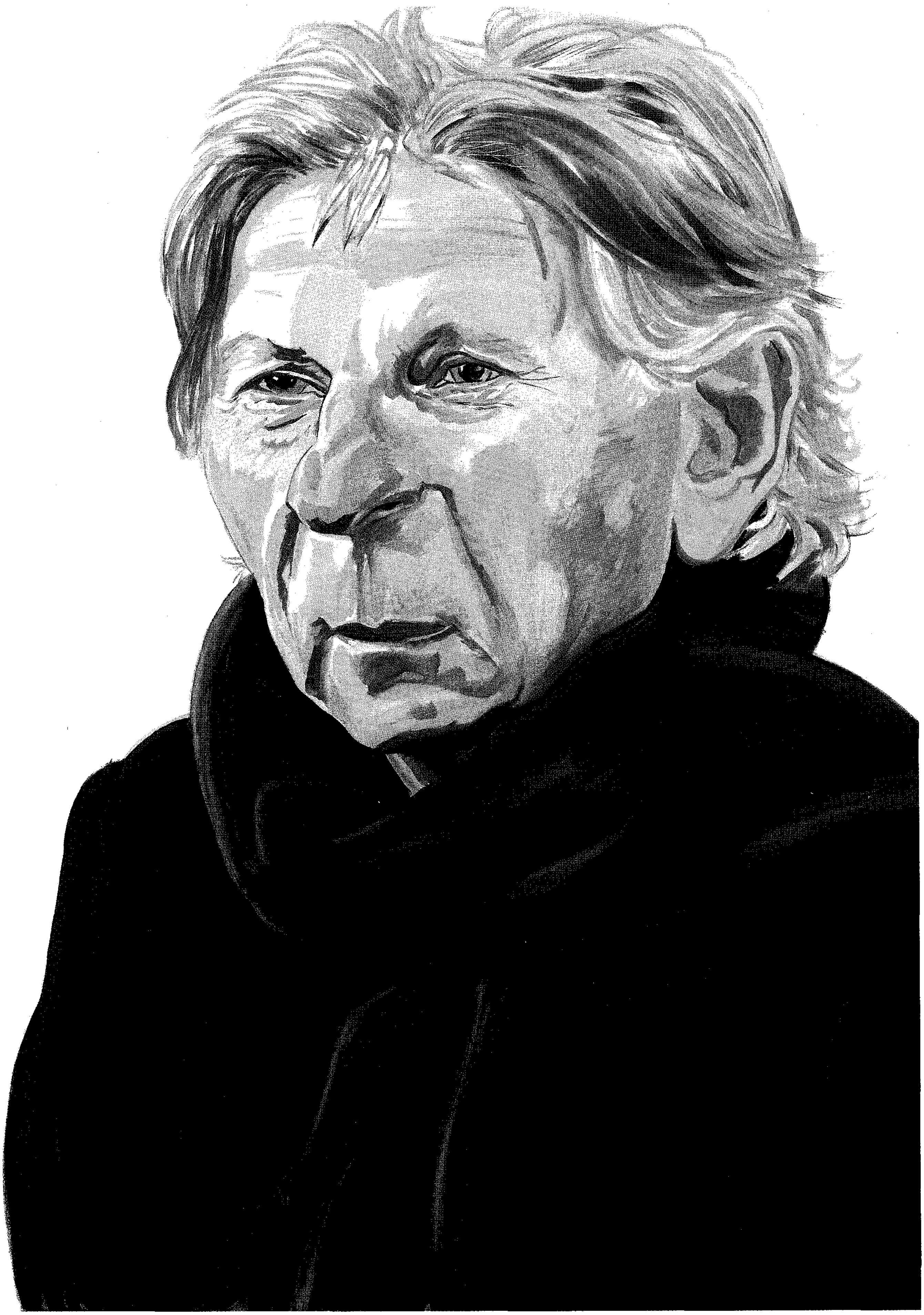
But the case did not end there, and, almost thirty-three years later, it's still not over. On March 24, 1977, a Los Angeles County grand jury indicted Polanski on six felony counts, including rape by use of drugs and furnishing a controlled substance to a minor. On August 8, 1977, pursuant to a plea bargain, Polanski pleaded guilty to the least serious of the charges against him, having unlawful sex with a minor—statutory rape. On the eve of his sentencing hearing, which was scheduled for February 1, 1978, Polanski fled to Europe, and he has not returned.

Earlier this year, on September 26th, he was detained in Switzerland after American authorities made a provisional request for his arrest. Last week, Polanski's lawyers provided the deed to his apartment in Paris, the final piece of security to raise $4.5 million for a bail package that had been approved by the local courts. Under the terms of the arrangement, Polanski was then released to house arrest at his chalet, known as Milky Way, in the Swiss ski resort of Gstaad, having spent sixty-seven days in a Zurich detention center. The large amount of bail, and a requirement for him to wear an electronic monitoring bracelet, might seem extreme for a seventy-six-year-old man; but, considering that Polanski is one of the most famous fugitives from American justice in the world, his release from prison under any terms at all may seem like a generous deal for him.

The question of whether Polanski's celebrity has helped or hurt him hovers over his lengthy legal battle. For Vannatter, the lesson in Polanski's long flight from justice is that celebrities enjoy special privileges in the legal system—a subject on which he possesses a unique vantage point. Seventeen years after arresting Polanski, Vannatter, with his partner Tom Lange, led the investigation of the murder of O. J. Simpson's ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend Ronald Goldman. (Simpson was acquitted.) "I just think that celebrities get a sweetheart deal, more than the average guy does," Vannatter, who retired from the L.A.P.D. in 1996 and moved, part-time, to a farm he bought in Indiana, said. "I never believed in that."

It is easy to see why Vannatter and many others find such a moral in Polanski's story. Polanski has enjoyed a comfortable exile in Europe, where until this year he not only avoided prison but continued to make films. For decades, his conviction for a felony sex crime existed mostly as a footnote in a long and eventful life. But the Polanski story suggests an alternative view, too. Over the years, there have also been times when he has been penalized for his celebrity status. Mostly, celebrity warps the criminal

PHILIP BURKE



"Roman is not defeated by anything," a friend says. "He is neither in denial nor apologetic about his life."

process, and not always in a predictable direction. In Polanski's case, the effect of his celebrity was doubly, and inconsistently, pernicious; it obscured both how badly Polanski treated his young victim and how badly the legal system treated him.

Polanski's period of house arrest will mark a return to an alpine village that has long been a favorite escape for him. Friends of Polanski brought him to Gstaad to help him recover from his grief over the murder of Sharon Tate. On that visit, in the late sixties, Polanski discovered that Gstaad was, he wrote in an autobiography, "the finishing school capital of the world [with] hundreds of fresh-faced, nubile young girls of all nationalities." At the time, "Kathy, Madeleine, Sylvia and others whose names I forget played a fleeting but therapeutic role in my life. They were all between sixteen and nineteen years old. . . . They took to visiting my chalet, not necessarily to make love—though some of them did—but to listen to rock music and sit around the fire and talk." He described sitting in his car outside the schools at night, waiting for his "date" to climb out over the balcony after roll call. At this age, Polanski wrote, the girls "were more beautiful, in a natural, coltish way, than they ever would be again." The autobiography, "Roman, by Polanski," was published in 1984, seven years after his guilty plea, and suggests a lack of contrition about his actions. While exile and tragedy have been persistent themes in Polanski's life, so, too, has a sexual obsession with very young women. He started dating the actress Nastassja Kinski when he was in his mid-forties and she was in her mid-teens. He has been together with his wife, Emmanuelle Seigner, since he was fifty-one and she was eighteen.

And then, of course, there is the criminal case involving thirteen-year-old Samantha Gailey. In his autobiography, he wrote of the day that Vannatter arrested him, "I was incredulous; I couldn't equate what had happened that day with rape in any form." In an interview two years after the crime, with Martin Amis, Polanski spoke in even blunter terms: "When I was being driven to the police station from the hotel, the car radio was already talking about it. . . . I couldn't *believe*. . . . I thought, you know, I was going to wake up from it. I realize, if I have *killed* somebody, it wouldn't have had so much appeal to the press, you see? But . . . fucking, you see, and the young girls. Judges want to fuck young girls. Juries want to fuck young girls—*everyone* wants to fuck young girls!"

"Sorry. He's been cursing like that ever since we put him in that little sailor suit."

Roman Polanski has led the kind of life that has already called forth multiple biographies. He was born in Paris in 1933, and his survival into adulthood must count as something close to a miracle. His father, a Jewish émigré from Poland whom Polanski described as a "struggling entrepreneur," made the extraordinarily unwise decision to return his family to Kraków in 1936. After Hitler's invasion, the family was confined to the city's ghetto. His mother, four months pregnant, was taken to Auschwitz and gassed; his father was carried off, too, but somehow survived. On March 14, 1943, the Germans completed the liquidation of the ghetto.

"He has a world view which has been informed by terrible events, unspeakable events, that have never soured him as a person. There is no bitterness, no anger, though there is memory," Jeff Berg, his longtime agent, who spoke to Polanski while he was jailed, told me. "Roman is not defeated by anything," Peter Gethers, who edited his autobiography and wrote two screenplays with him, said. "He doesn't regret the things that happen to him, because he understands that things just happen. He is neither in denial nor apologetic about his life. He wouldn't use the word, but it's a very existential approach to life."

Polanski's early life seems to have instilled in him a voraciousness for experience—intellectual, physical, sexual. Amid the deprivations of postwar Poland, the young Polanski became an accomplished actor, skier, bicycle racer, fencer, mimic, and artist. Summer camp changed his life. "I became Troop 22's head of entertainment," he wrote in his autobiography. "Organizing, directing, and starring in all our Boy Scout shows. I had discovered my vocation."

In the early fifties, Polanski joined the threadbare Polish film community in

Lodz. He made a handful of experimental shorts. His first full-length feature was "Knife in the Water," a dark, atmospheric drama about a married couple who pick up a young stranger on the way to an excursion on their boat. It earned Polanski an Academy Award nomination in 1963 for Best Foreign Language Film. "I flew into L.A. first class and was met by a huge limousine sporting a Polish flag on the fender," he wrote. (He lost to Federico Fellini, for "8½.")

Polanski landed in Hollywood at a propitious moment. "It was a great time in the movie business," Peter Bart, then the vice-president for production at Paramount and later the editor of *Variety*, said. "It was possible to be a great artist and make pictures that made money, too." Shortly after Polanski's Oscar nomination, Paramount acquired the rights to Ira Levin's book "Rosemary's Baby," a satanic thriller. After Polanski rejected Bart's initial requests that he direct the movie version, Bart asked his boss at Paramount, Robert Evans, to intervene. "Bob called up Roman and said, 'What have you got to lose? If you come to L.A., the worst thing that can happen is that you are going to have the best sex of your life.' Roman said, 'I'll be there.' "

"Rosemary's Baby" became a huge success, and Polanski found himself a member of a celebrated generation of young actors and directors, including Warren Beatty, Jack Nicholson, Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, and Brian De Palma. "For the first time, we were making money," Bart said. "Roman started to like this community. He loved the fast life. He became a real star. He got good tables in restaurants. That had not been part of his life. You could see him change, to a degree. The unthinkable happened to Roman—he was actually happy."

Polanski even found a woman he loved, a young actress named Sharon Tate, and they married on January 20, 1968. When Tate was pregnant with their first child, she and Polanski rented a house on the quiet and remote Cielo Drive.

"The answer isn't more troops—what you need is an antibiotic."

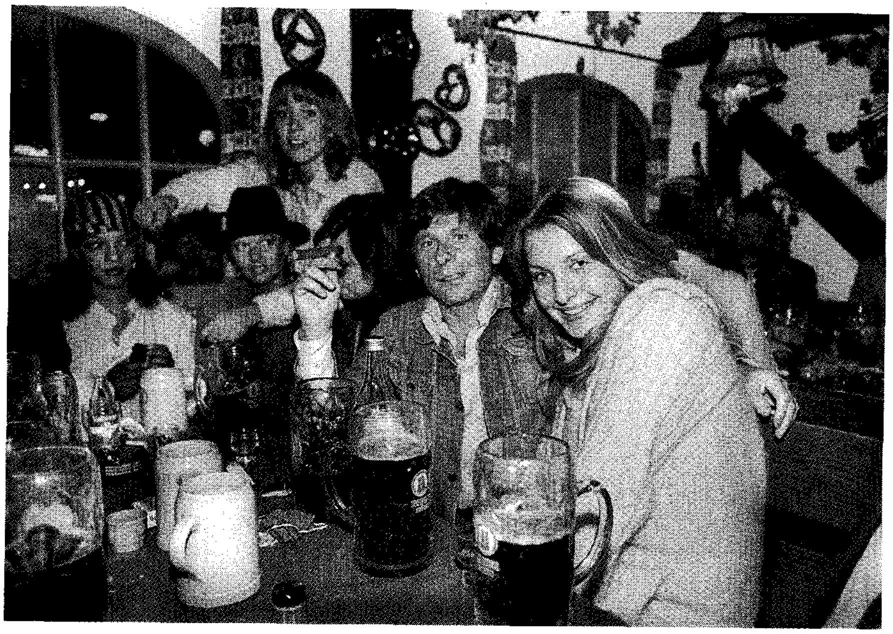
It was shortly before dinner on August 9, 1969, when Polanski, who was in London, received the phone call. His maid had found the bodies: Tate, who was eight and a half months pregnant; Jay Sebring, a Hollywood hair stylist; Wojtek Frykowski, a friend of Polanski's from Poland; and Abigail Folger, Frykowski's girlfriend and an heiress to the Folger coffee fortune. (Steven Parent, who had been visiting the estate's caretaker, was shot outside.) Tate had been stabbed sixteen times, Folger twenty-eight, and Frykowski fifty-one (and shot twice). The word "PIG" was written in Tate's blood on the front door.

For months, the crime was unsolved, and it became the subject of a torrent of speculation, with some insinuations directed at Polanski. *Time* noted that "Sharon and Polanski circulated in one of the film world's more offbeat crowds." The innuendo wounded Polanski, who assisted the police, and offered a reward for leads. Finally, on December 1st, the police announced that the case had been solved. Most of the Manson "family" members who had conducted the attacks were already in custody. Manson had no connection to Polanski, or to any of the victims.

"Sharon's death is the only watershed in my life that really matters," Polanski wrote. "Afterward, whenever conscious of enjoying myself, I felt guilty." After months of wandering, and much skiing, and eventually running out of money, Polanski directed a movie version of "Macbeth," which was a critical and commercial debacle. A little later, his friend Robert Evans asked him to direct a script, by Robert Towne, about the murky origins of modern Los Angeles. Polanski was reluctant, but Evans courted him by hosting a Passover Seder, with Kirk Douglas presiding and Sidney Korshak, the mob fixer, arranging the catering. Polanski agreed to direct "Chinatown." That film, which came out in 1974 and features a victim of incest trying to protect her daughter from the same fate, earned Polanski his next Academy Award nomination. (He lost to Coppola, for "The Godfather, Part II.")

In the years after Tate's death, Polanski lived a gilded itinerancy, mostly in Europe. He shot "The Tenant," a thriller in which he also starred, in Paris, and directed "Rigoletto" at the Bavarian State Opera, in Munich. In his autobiography, Polanski recounted an evening in Munich in late 1976 when he and a journalist friend went on a double date. At Polanski's hotel suite, the journalist stayed with his date, whom Polanski knew only as "Nasty," and "I took the other girl, a stunning blonde, to bed. By the time I surfaced the journalist had gone. Nasty was half-asleep in an armchair in the sitting room. Taking her by the hand, I led her back into the bedroom. We never repeated this threesome, though I saw a lot of both girls thereafter." Nasty was Nastassja Kinski, an aspiring German actress. Kinski spoke little English, and Polanski spoke no German. She was, according to Polanski, fifteen years old.

Late in the fall of 1976, French *Vogue* asked Polanski to guest-edit its Christmas edition. He took Kinski to the Seychelles and used photographs taken of her there in the issue. He then secured an assignment from *Vogue Hommes*, also based in Paris, to shoot a feature on adolescent girls, to "show girls as they really were these days—sexy, pert, and thoroughly human," he wrote in his autobiography.



Left: Samantha Gailey. Above: Polanski with a group of women during the Munich Oktoberfest, in September, 1977—the photograph that infuriated Judge Rittenband.

LEFT: SCOPE FEATURES/LANDOV; RIGHT: ISTVAN BAJZAT/PICTURE ALLIANCE

Polanski headed to Los Angeles, where he was preparing to direct an adaptation of "The First Deadly Sin," a novel by Lawrence Sanders, concerning a serial killer. He mentioned the *Vogue* assignment to a friend, Henri Sera, who suggested that the younger sister of a woman he was dating might make a good subject. This tip led Polanski to make an appointment to meet Samantha Gailey and her mother at their home in the suburb of Woodland Hills, on February 13, 1977. During the visit, Susan Gailey, a divorced actress who had played small roles in "Police Woman" and "Starsky and Hutch," did most of the talking. Also at the meeting was Susan Gailey's boyfriend, who was an editor at *Marijuana Monthly*. As Gailey later testified before the grand jury, Polanski showed her the *Vogue* Christmas issue and explained that his current project was to feature "young girls seen through his eyes and possibly an interview." Gailey recalled telling Polanski that her daughter was thirteen, "because I thought maybe she was too old. I thought he might want younger girls."

Although the legal case involving Polanski remains controversial and unresolved, the underlying facts are largely undisputed. Except for a few specific details, what happened between Polanski and Samantha Gailey is pretty clear.

At that first encounter with Samantha, at her home, Polanski claims to have been "disappointed" because she was "a good-looking girl but nothing sensational." Still, Polanski arranged to return a week later to take some photographs of Samantha. He arrived at about 4 P.M. on February 20th; Susan had laid out a selection of clothes that the girl might wear. Polanski said at first that he wanted to shoot in Benedict Canyon, but, concerned with the fading light in the late afternoon, he agreed with Susan's suggestion that he go to some scrubby hills just behind the Gailey home. Susan asked to go along—so that she could take her own pictures—but, she testified, "He said, No, that he would rather be alone with her because she will respond more naturally."

Polanski selected some clothes and drove Samantha to a hillside near her home. They walked and Polanski started taking pictures. He took a number of shots of her in different shirts and then, according to Samantha's grand-jury testimony, "He said, 'Here, take off your top now.'" She did, and they finished the session at about six-thirty in the evening, after Polanski had shot about two rolls of film. "She had nice breasts," Polanski wrote. "I took pictures of her changing and topless." Samantha did not tell her mother about the topless photos. When they returned to the house, Susan's boyfriend gave Polanski several issues of *Marijuana Monthly* to give to Jack Nicholson, in the hope of obtaining an interview with him.

Polanski then flew to New York to do research on police procedures for "The First Deadly Sin." When he returned to L.A., he made an appointment to see Samantha on March 10th. Polanski again arrived in the late afternoon, greeted her mother, and drove off with Samantha. They went first to the home of a friend, the actress Jacqueline Bisset, who lived on Mulholland Drive, in the Hollywood Hills. They took about fifty pictures, but the light was fading, and there were several guests on the premises. So Polanski called Jack Nicholson's house, on the other side of Mulholland. He reached Helena Kallianiotes, a professional belly dancer who worked as a caretaker for Nicholson as well as for Marlon Brando, who owned the compound. She told Polanski to come over.

Kallianiotes let Polanski and Samantha in, then chatted with them in the kitchen. Samantha said she was thirsty. Polanski poured glasses of Cristal champagne for the three of them. Kallianiotes left, and Polanski began taking pictures of Samantha sipping the champagne. "I just kept drinking it for pictures," she testified. Polanski again asked her to pose topless, which she did. "We weren't saying much now, and I could sense a certain erotic tension between us," Polanski wrote. Samantha dialled her mother, at Polanski's request, and he told Susan that they would be later than expected. Susan also spoke to Samantha, who told her that she was fine.

After the phone call, Polanski asked Samantha to pose in Nicholson's outdoor Jacuzzi. Polanski produced a yellow pill container with a quaalude broken into three parts. When he offered Samantha part of the pill, she hesitantly accepted. "I think I must have been pretty drunk or else I wouldn't have," she testified. (Polanski does not mention the pill in his book.)

Samantha removed all her clothes, except for her underwear, before entering the Jacuzzi. "I was ready to get in and he said, 'Take off your underwear.' So I did and then I got in," she testified. Polanski took more photographs of her, then removed his clothes and joined her in the Jacuzzi. When Polanski moved toward her, Samantha said she wanted to get out because her asthma was acting up. (This was not true; she'd never had asthma.) "I had to get out because of the warm air and the cold air or something like that," Samantha testified that she had said. She also said that she wanted to go home. Polanski wrote that "she said she'd stupidly left her medication at home." He encouraged her to join him in Nicholson's swimming pool instead, which she did. After a few moments, she left the pool and went inside to the bathroom.

At this point, Gailey's story and Polanski's diverge somewhat. She told the grand jury that he approached her in the bathroom "and told me to go in the other room and lie down." She went into the room, then asked again to go home. He said he would take her home later. He began kissing her, and then began performing oral sex on her. "I was ready to cry. I was kind of—I was going, 'No. Come on. Stop it.'" In light of the champagne and the quaalude, Samantha said, "I was kind of dizzy, you know, like things were kind of blurry sometimes. . . . I was mostly just on and off saying, 'No, stop.'"

Polanski began having intercourse with her and asked whether she was on the pill (she said no) and when her last period was (she couldn't remember). Polanski said, "'Oh, I won't come inside of you then,' . . . then he lifted up my legs farther and he went in through my anus," despite her saying that she didn't want him to. Samantha said she did not fight back physically, "because I was afraid of him," though she continued to ask him to stop.

In his book, Polanski described the sexual encounter this way: "We dried ourselves and each other. She said she was feeling better. Then, very gently, I began to kiss and caress her. After this had gone on for some time, I led her over to the couch. There was no doubt about her experience and lack of inhibition. She spread herself and I entered her. She wasn't unresponsive."

While Polanski and Gailey were in the bedroom, Anjelica Huston, Nicholson's girlfriend, arrived at the house. Soon after, Polanski and Gailey made an awkward departure—"I didn't mention making love in the TV room, though that must have been pretty obvious," he wrote. Samantha had hurried out before he did. "I was sitting in the car and I was crying," Gailey testified. According to Polanski, Samantha "talked a lot during the drive home" and mentioned that she was studying "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in school. "I tried not to wince when she started spouting Shakespeare in a strong Valley accent." Before they reached the Gailey home, she testified, he said to her, "Don't tell your mother about this, and don't tell your boyfriend either. . . . This is our secret."

Inside the house, Susan Gailey thought that her daughter was "weird looking." Samantha told her, out of Polanski's earshot, that she had invented a case of asthma, and then hastily retreated to her bedroom. Polanski showed Samantha's mother and her sister, Kim, the photographs from the first session, on the hillside. When they saw Samantha topless, the atmosphere in the room turned tense. According to Susan's testimony, "Kim stepped back. And I kind of stepped back. And the dog peed on the floor and Kim went for the dog and threw her out. And she doesn't do that. It must have been some kind of energy thing happening." (After the dog's accident, Kim testified, "Roman gave me a big speech on how to take care of dogs.")

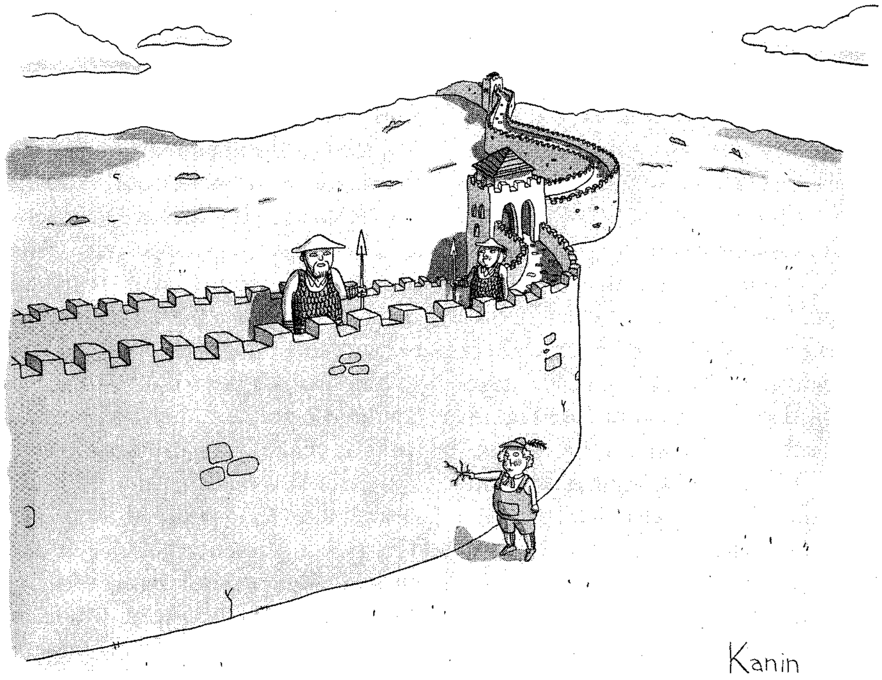
Samantha's boyfriend came over later that night, and she told him what had happened. Kim overheard them, and informed Susan. Enraged at the news, Susan Gailey called the police. The police arrived after 11 P.M. and took a statement from Samantha, and then took her to a hospital, where she was examined. By the following evening, Vannatter had placed Polanski under arrest.

On the night of Polanski's arrest, his entertainment lawyer helped arrange his release on bail of twenty-five hundred dollars. The lawyer then quickly hired Douglas Dalton to take the criminal case. Dalton's representation of Polanski is now well into its fourth decade.

Once one of the most prominent lawyers in Los Angeles, Dalton has not practiced for years. "I turn eighty this year, and I've been retired for ten years," Dalton told me, as we sat in front of the fireplace in his Tudor-style mansion, near Hancock Park. "But I've kept my law license active for this one case, just because I feel what happened to Roman was so wrong. The system was totally out of control."

Polanski's arrest, on March 11, 1977, set off what was usually described as a media frenzy, even if the press reaction seems almost quaint when judged by the standards of the cable-news and Internet era. Crowds of photographers greeted Polanski at his court appearances, and Johnny Carson made jokes about him ("Close Encounters with the Third Grade"). But, by and large, Dalton was free to build his best defense—and, at least initially, to use Polanski's celebrity to his advantage. "We investigated this case and expected it to go to trial," Dalton told me.

The early signs were not promising for Polanski. Samantha Gailey's grand-



"Hey, come over here—that little Dutch kid is back."

jury testimony, which she gave on March 24, 1977, laid out a damaging case against him. On the issues of drugs and coercion, Vannatter's investigation established important points of corroboration. Undeveloped photos in Polanski's camera showed Gailey in Nicholson's Jacuzzi, and her drinking champagne. A pill bottle found in Polanski's hotel room featured a prescription for quaaludes. Gailey's concoction of the asthma attack, which Polanski acknowledged, suggested that she was trying to escape from him. Anjelica Huston also agreed to testify for the prosecution.

But the Polanski defense had options, particularly at a time when rape cases were treated in different ways than they are now. In her grand-jury testimony, Gailey acknowledged that she was not a virgin (she had had sex twice with her boyfriend, who was seventeen) and that she had once accidentally taken a quaalude. California had a rape shield law, which would have limited what Gailey could be questioned about on the stand, but it wouldn't have protected her entirely from public scrutiny. That process had begun. Dalton told the press, "The facts indicate that before the alleged act in this case, this girl had engaged in sexual activity. . . . We want to know about it, we want to know who was involved, when. We want to know why these other people were not prosecuted. And this is a thing we want to fully develop." Likewise, the character and behavior of Susan Gailey might have come into play in a trial. Susan could have been portrayed as a neglectful parent who, in essence, offered up her daughter in order to ingratiate herself with a famous director. In the climate of the time, it mattered little that attacks on Samantha and her mother might not have been relevant (or true); rape defendants had been acquitted with less.

Samantha's father, who was a lawyer, lived in another state, and he arranged for her to be represented by a Los Angeles attorney named Lawrence Silver. (Silver, who is still her lawyer, did not respond to requests for comment.) He allowed Gailey to give testimony before the grand jury (which is a closed proceeding), but, mindful of the fate that often awaited rape victims, he did not want her to have to appear in a public trial. Dalton artfully leveraged Silver's concern for Gailey into a critical advantage for Polanski.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1977, Dalton and the prosecutors skirmished over access to evidence (Gailey's underwear was cut in half, so that both sides could test it) and other procedural issues. Any notion of a plea bargain stalled when the government insisted that, according to the policy of the district attorney's office, Polanski be allowed to plea only to the most serious count against him—in this case, rape with the use of drugs, which carried a sentence of at least three years. Dalton wanted a misdemeanor plea or, at most, a plea to the least serious count, statutory rape, which would likely incur a shorter sentence. Silver wrote a letter saying that Gailey did not want to testify, and her family did not want her to, either:

> Long before I had met any other attorney in this case, my clients informed me that their goal in pressing the charges did not include seeking the incarceration of the defendant, but rather, the admission by him of wrongdoing and commencement by him, under the supervision of the court, of a program to insure complete rehabilitation. . . . Whatever harm has come to her as a victim would be exacerbated in the extreme if this case went to trial.

A reporter had told him that this "promised to be one of the most sensational Hollywood trials," Silver wrote. "This is not the place for a recovering young girl."

This was perhaps the clearest example of Polanski's celebrity helping him: the attention drove the victim to try to withdraw from the case. And so the D.A.'s office agreed to allow Polanski to plea to felony statutory rape, the least serious count in the indictment, which he did, on August 8, 1977.

At the insistence of the prosecution, Polanski received what's known as an "open plea"—that is, a plea where his sentence was left to the discretion of the judge, Laurence J. Rittenband. At the hearing, Polanski said he knew that the maximum sentence for his crime was "one to fifteen-twenty years in state prison." The prosecutor, Roger Gunson, asked Polanski, "Who do you believe will decide what your sentence will be in this matter?"

"The Judge," Polanski said.

"Who do you think will decide whether or not you will get probation?"

"The Judge."

Silver read his letter in open court. Midway through, Rittenband interrupted him. "I think some of the reporters are taking notes," he said. "You might read a little slower, so that they will be able to get this."

The plea bargain is the moment when the case pivoted from the story of what Polanski did to Samantha Gailey to the story of what the system did to him. Polanski's detractors focus on the first, his supporters on the second, but the two are intertwined, and both were shaped by the influence of Polanski's celebrity.

Polanski's fate was now in the hands of Judge Rittenband, who had, by 1977, established himself as an eccentric figure on the Los Angeles legal scene. A New York-born prodigy, Rittenband went straight from high school to New York University Law School; too young to take the bar exam after earning his law degree, Rittenband filled the time by acquiring an undergraduate education at Harvard. Wounded in the Second World War, he moved to California, started practicing law, and won appointment as a judge in 1961. Rittenband presided in the Santa Monica courthouse and could be a querulous, domineering presence on the bench. He snared many of the high-profile cases that tend to occur in that tony region of Los Angeles County—Elvis and Priscilla Presley's divorce, a child-custody case involving Marlon Brando, a paternity suit against Cary Grant.

Rittenband was a peripheral Hollywood player—a lifelong bachelor who juggled several girlfriends and enjoyed the friendship of movie stars at the Hillcrest Country Club. He also seems to have sought out the news media more than other judges. As Rittenband assumed control of the case, Polanski's celebrity, heretofore an important advantage for him, became more of a mixed blessing.

Since the nineteen-seventies, in California and elsewhere, criminal sentencing has changed dramatically, particularly with regard to the role of the judge. "California used to have a wide-open system, where the law gave the judge a lot of discretion about how long to sentence someone," Robert Weisberg, a professor at Stanford Law School, said. That system, which was known as "indeterminate sentencing," evolved into the current, very different regime, which is known as "determinate sentencing." Judges now have far less latitude, and discretionary parole has been abolished for most crimes in California. Sentences are more severe. Today, an adult defendant who pleaded guilty to statutory rape in California would likely receive about three years in state prison.

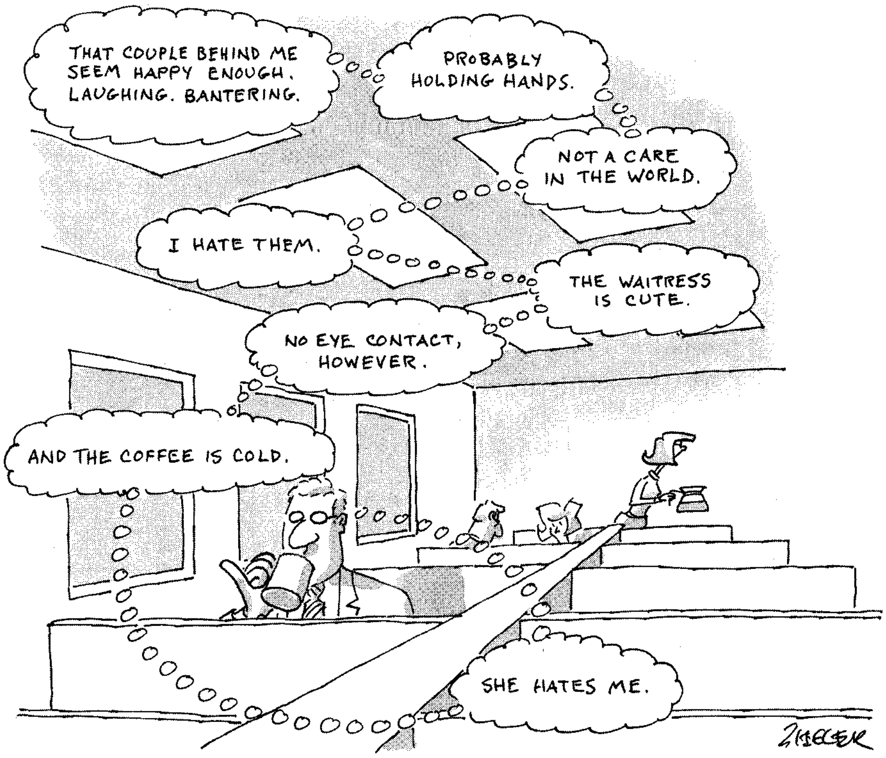
In addition, the sentencing process has become more formalized, with the judges being required to present explicit findings concerning how they reached decisions. Three decades ago, especially in Rittenband's courtroom, a case would often be resolved with an off-the-record understanding among the lawyers and the judge. Dalton was hoping for a deal that would lead to probation.

After Polanski's guilty plea, his chances for a light sentence at first seemed good. In the previous year, according to Polanski's defense team, none of the convictions for statutory rape in Los Angeles County resulted in a sentence to state prison, although many defendants spent time in county jails or lockups. (How many defendants had been allowed to plea down from charges as serious as those against Polanski is another question.) The report in the case by the probation officer, Irwin Gold, read more like the words of a starstruck fan than like those of a law-enforcement officer. After a lengthy summary of Polanski's tragic past, Gold wrote, "Possibly not since Renaissance Italy has there been such a gathering of creative minds in one locale as there has been in Los Angeles County during the past half-century. The motion-picture industry has proved [a] magnet to many of them." As for Polanski's crime, Gold wrote:

> There was some indication that circumstances were provocative, that there was some permissiveness by the mother, that the victim was not only physically mature, but willing; as one doctor has additionally suggested there was the lack of coercion by the defendant who was, additionally, solicitous regarding the possibility of pregnancy. It is believed that incalculable emotional damage could result from incarcerating the defendant whose own life has been a seemingly unending series of punishments.

Alvin E. Davis, the psychiatrist Gold cited, seemed equally smitten, writing that incarceration "would impose an unusual degree of stress and hardship because of [Polanski's] highly sensitive personality and devotion to his work." Davis saw the rape as the result of the "loss of normal inhibitions in circumstances of intimacy and collaboration in creative work, and with some coincidental alcohol and drug intoxication." In the report's twisted recitation, Polanski's proffer of alcohol and drugs to a child becomes exculpatory; his claim of a "lack of coercion" is accepted as fact.

But on September 16, 1977, three


THAT COUPLE BEHIND ME SEEM HAPPY ENOUGH. LAUGHING. BANTERING.
PROBABLY HOLDING HANDS.
NOT A CARE IN THE WORLD.
I HATE THEM.
THE WAITRESS IS CUTE.
NO EYE CONTACT, HOWEVER.
AND THE COFFEE IS COLD.
SHE HATES ME.
ZIEGLER

days before Polanski was to be sentenced, Rittenband called the lawyers in the case to an off-the-record private meeting in his chambers—a meeting that remains a crucial point of controversy in the case. According to Dalton, Rittenband said that he had decided to order Polanski to go to the state prison at Chino for a "diagnostic study" of his mental state, which might take as long as ninety days, under a California law that allowed for evaluation of prisoners before sentencing. Assuming that the report from the psychiatrists at Chino would be favorable, Dalton later wrote in a court filing, the Judge told the lawyers that "the diagnostic study at Chino would constitute defendant Polanski's punishment and that there would be no further incarceration." At the meeting, the prosecutor and the probation officer told Judge Rittenband that it was inappropriate to use a diagnostic study as a punishment, but the Judge ignored them, and an improvisational sentence was not, in fact, unusual for its time.

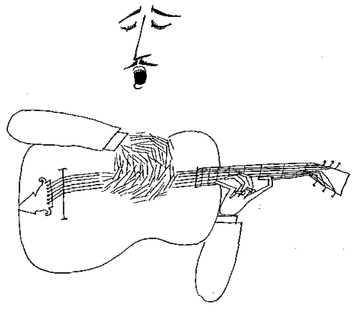
Rittenband made another request: he asked for what Dalton, in a 2008 affidavit, called a "charade of arguing our respective positions at the Probation and Sentencing Hearing on September 19." Dalton told me, "Rittenband said, 'You both argue. You argue for a prison sentence, and you argue for probation.' But it was all for show"—he had already made up his mind. (Gunson, the prosecutor, agrees with this version of events.) Three days later, at the public hearing, Gunson and Dalton did as Rittenband instructed. Rittenband also kept to his script and ordered the mental evaluation at Chino.

Dalton expressed no real objection to the diagnostic sentence, because his client appeared to be on a glide path to avoiding real prison time. "All we needed was a good psychiatric report, and Roman would have been free," Dalton said. But the defense lawyer made what turned out to be a miscalculation. At the September 16th meeting in Rittenband's chambers, Dalton asked the Judge to stay the order of incarceration until Polanski could complete work on a new directing project. In another example of Polanski's privileged status, Rittenband said that he would publicly authorize a reprieve of only ninety days, but he told Dalton, off the record, that he would have the option of asking for further stays, until the film was finished.

Polanski's plan to direct "The First Deadly Sin" had fallen through after his arrest, but he was quickly hired to direct a remake of the 1937 film "The Hurricane," which was to be produced by Dino de Laurentiis, a major figure in middlebrow seventies cinema. Polanski was happy to get the work, even if it appeared likely to fall below his usual aesthetic standards. (The plot was to include pearl divers getting caught in a giant clam.) "Dino's faith in me showed I had ceased to be a complete Hollywood outcast," Polanski wrote. He wanted Kinski to play the female lead. "Although Dino was bowled over by her looks, he doubted if she could acquire a sufficient command of English before shooting began."

De Laurentiis asked Polanski to go to Europe, to set up a West German distribution deal. While there, Polanski was photographed at an Oktoberfest celebration in Munich, sitting amid a group of attractive young women, and smoking a cigar. The picture went out on the U.P.I. wire, and was printed in the September 29, 1977, edition of the Santa Monica *Evening Outlook*, with a caption stating that Polanski "enjoys the companionship of some young ladies at the Munich, Germany, Oktoberfest." The photograph infuriated Rittenband, who believed that Polanski was abusing the privilege of the stay of his sentence. Rittenband gave an interview to a gossip columnist (even then an unusual thing for a judge to do in a pending case), Marylin Beck, who reported that "Roman Polanski could be on his way to prison this weekend." Polanski's celebrity was turning against him.

Rittenband ordered Dalton to bring Polanski back to Santa Monica for a hearing about why the stay should not be revoked. At the hearing, on October 24th, Dalton called witnesses, including de Laurentiis, who established that Polanski had a legitimate business reason for being in Germany. Rittenband was persuaded to leave the stay in effect, but he declined to extend the ninety-day limit. Given the uncertainty of Polanski's situation, de Laurentiis fired him. (The film, directed by Jan Troell and starring Mia Farrow, was released in 1979, to dismal public response.) Polanski entered the Chino prison shortly before Christmas and was released, when his evaluation was complete, forty-two days later, on January 29, 1978. According to a letter to Rittenband from Chino's associate superintendent, "Staff are in agreement the granting of probation in this case would be in the best interest of all concerned."



On January 30th, the day after Polanski was released—and two days before he was to be officially sentenced—Rittenband summoned the lawyers for another private meeting. Rittenband said that he was unhappy with the diagnostic report, which he called a "whitewash." This was, to be sure, an understandable reaction, given that the Chino report, like the earlier probation report, was extremely deferential toward Polanski. But Rittenband also expressed discomfort with the way his rulings had been received by the public. He had changed his mind again, saying that he had decided to impose an additional prison sentence. The Judge said he was considering limiting the further punishment to forty-eight days—to complete the original ninety days—but only if Polanski then agreed to leave the United States for good. (Polanski did not have a green card; he is a French and Polish citizen.) At a meeting the next day, with Lawrence Silver, Gailey's lawyer, also present, Rittenband said, according to Dalton, that "there was nothing which could be produced by the defense that would influence him regarding his intended sentence."

Dalton informed Polanski of the latest dispiriting turn of events. It wasn't clear what Rittenband was going to do, although it did seem that there would be more prison time in Polanski's future—perhaps just forty-eight days, or perhaps

FROM STARING AT YOUR PICTURES ON MY DESK ALL DAY AT WORK, I ALMOST FEEL I KNOW YOU.

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more. (It was also not clear how Rittenband planned to enforce his deportation plan. State judges have no authority over immigration matters.) Polanski wrote in his autobiography, "Since it was clear that I had served my forty-two days in Chino for nothing, an obvious question arose: what had I to gain by staying? The answer appeared to be: nothing." In fact, Polanski had the right to appeal any sentence that Rittenband might impose, although prevailing would be a long shot. But Polanski decided that he had trusted the American legal system long enough. That evening, without telling Dalton, he took a British Airways flight to London. By the following morning, when Dalton appeared in front of Rittenband to announce that Polanski had fled, the director had flown on to Paris. At what would have been the sentencing hearing, on February 1st, Rittenband issued a bench warrant for the arrest of Polanski, who was now a fugitive.

Five days later, on February 6th, Rittenband held a press conference in his chambers to denounce Polanski for fleeing and to reveal that he planned to sentence him in absentia. He confirmed that he had wanted Polanski to leave the country after his release. Dalton responded by filing a motion to have Rittenband recused from the case for bias. (Holding a press conference about a pending case was one of the grounds.) Rittenband agreed to be replaced, though he refused to acknowledge any wrongdoing; if Polanski had returned, his case would have been heard by a different judge. In subsequent years, Rittenband nevertheless vowed to sit on the bench until Polanski came back, but he retired in 1989, and died in 1993, at the age of eighty-eight.

Polanski settled into a spacious apartment on the Avenue Montaigne. By August, 1978, seven months after fleeing the States, he was shooting his next film, "Tess," a movie version of Thomas Hardy's "Tess of the d'Urbervilles," starring Nastassja Kinski, who was still in her teens. (The story features an older man who either seduces or rapes the young Tess.) The film won Polanski his third Academy Award nomination. (He lost to Robert Redford, for "Ordinary People.")

Thus began Polanski's fruitful, if

"Can I call you back? We're having our favorite argument."

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somewhat circumscribed, years of exile. "Roman is a superstar in the streets of Paris," his friend Thom Mount, who produced three of Polanski's movies, said. "He walks into a restaurant, and the headwaiter faints." Polanski's status as a fugitive from American justice has made it difficult, but not impossible, for him to continue to direct major films. "The case was more than just background noise," Jeff Berg, his agent, said. "It determined what he could do and where he could do it and with whom he could work." (Berg is the chief executive of International Creative Management, where I am also a client.) The terms of the Franco-American extradition treaty do not compel either country to extradite its own citizens, but Polanski has had to be careful in his travels; the United Kingdom, for example, has been off-limits. It was seven years between "Tess" and "Pirates," a misbegotten seafaring adventure starring, of all people, Walter Matthau. Two years later, in 1988, Polanski released "Frantic," a thriller set in Paris, with Harrison Ford and Emmanuelle Seigner, who was then his girlfriend. It turned out to be his last production with a major American studio. In 1989, he married Seigner, and over the following decade they had two children.

The legal case against Polanski largely faded from view. Every few years, Dalton made an overture to resolve the case, but the prosecutors always insisted that Polanski return to the United States first. Polanski refused to expose himself to that level of uncertainty. In 1997, Dalton came close to brokering a resolution, which would have required no further prison time for Polanski; according to Dalton, the judge assigned to the matter, Larry Fidler, had more or less signed off on the plan but insisted that the final hearing be televised. (Fidler, through a spokesman, denied imposing this condition. Gunson supports Dalton's recollection.) In any event, Polanski scuttled the plan.

The last turn in the case began, oddly enough, with perhaps the greatest triumph of Polanski's career. Polanski and his producing partners had pieced together financing to produce an adaptation of a Polish memoir, first published in 1946, called "Death of a City." The story of a musician who survived the Warsaw ghetto while his entire family perished, the movie was called "The Pianist," and it was released in 2002; it proved to be a perfect vehicle for the director, who turned seventy the following year. At last, Polanski's long-sought Oscar seemed within reach.

The success of "The Pianist" raised the question of whether Polanski would return to Los Angeles for the Academy Awards, and the Los Angeles *Times* ran a story about his long exile. "I saw that article, and it piqued my interest," Marina Zenovich, a documentary filmmaker, told me. "Then a little while later I saw Samantha Geimer on Larry King." Over the years, Geimer, née Gailey, had become an increasingly vocal supporter of Polanski's return. In 1993, Polanski reportedly agreed to pay five hundred thousand dollars to Geimer as a settlement in a civil suit. (It apparently took several years, and more legal wrangling, for the money to be paid.) She never backed down from her grand-jury testimony, but as she moved toward her forties, with a family of her own, Geimer urged the district attorney to allow Polanski to return without having to go to prison. On February 23, 2003, Geimer and her lawyer, Lawrence Silver, appeared on "Larry King Live." Silver said, "What happened that day, both to Polanski and to some extent the American judicial system—I really think it was a shameful day." Zenovich recalled, "That didn't make sense to me. So I decided to investigate the case myself." A few weeks later, Polanski won the Oscar for Best Director; he remained overseas for the ceremony.

In a previous documentary, Zenovich had become obsessed with her subject, the French businessman, politician, and actor Bernard Tapie; now she focussed the same fanatical level of attention on the long-dormant Polanski legal drama. Zenovich created an especially damning portrait of Judge Rittenband, complete with interviews with his girlfriends. Most important, Zenovich tracked down a player whose role had been unknown to Polanski's team. David Wells was a deputy district attorney who had worked briefly on the case before Gunson took over, and he told Zenovich that he had spoken secretly with the

Judge and pushed him to be tougher. Wells said that he had brought Rittenband the photograph of Polanski at Oktoberfest. "What I told him was . . . 'Look! He's giving you the finger. He's flipping you off,' " Wells told Zenovich. "He said, 'What? What? He's not getting away with that.'" (Wells has recently recanted this part of his interview, telling The Daily Beast, "I lied. . . . I thought it made a better story if I said I'd told the judge what to do." He declined to speak with me.) Wells's lobbying of Rittenband raised the spectre of prosecutorial and judicial misconduct and thus possible grounds for a dismissal of the case.

Zenovich's documentary, "Roman Polanski: Wanted and Desired," premièred at the Sundance Film Festival in 2008 and was broadcast on HBO later that year. The force of celebrity had buffeted the case once more. It had helped Polanski by persuading his victim to support a plea deal, and by inspiring a fawning probation report; it hurt him by drawing suspicion to his legitimate travel to Germany and prompting Rittenband's erratic decisions. Celebrity now helped by drawing Zenovich's attention, which, in turn, led to new questions about the case against him. His lawyers decided to make yet another attempt to resolve it.

Dalton recruited Chad Hummel, a partner at the Los Angeles firm of Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, to help with the case. Armed with Zenovich's fresh disclosures, Hummel and Dalton separately met with the prosecutors to whom the Polanski file had been passed. (Gunson had retired in 2002.) Their answer was the same as their predecessors': no deal until Polanski returned. The question for his lawyers now became whether the misconduct by Wells and Rittenband was so egregious that a judge might dismiss the case even in the face of Polanski's refusal to submit to the jurisdiction of American courts.

There was a precedent of sorts. In July, 2002, *Vanity Fair* had run a long article about the restaurant Elaine's, in New York. The piece included an anecdote from Lewis Lapham, then the editor of *Harper's*, who said that Polanski, while in New York on the way to Los Angeles for Sharon Tate's funeral, had made a pass at a woman at Elaine's, telling her, "I will make another Sharon Tate out of you." Polanski denied it, noting that he had not stopped in New York on his way from London, and sued *Vanity Fair's* parent company, Condé Nast, in British courts. (Condé Nast also owns *The New Yorker.*)

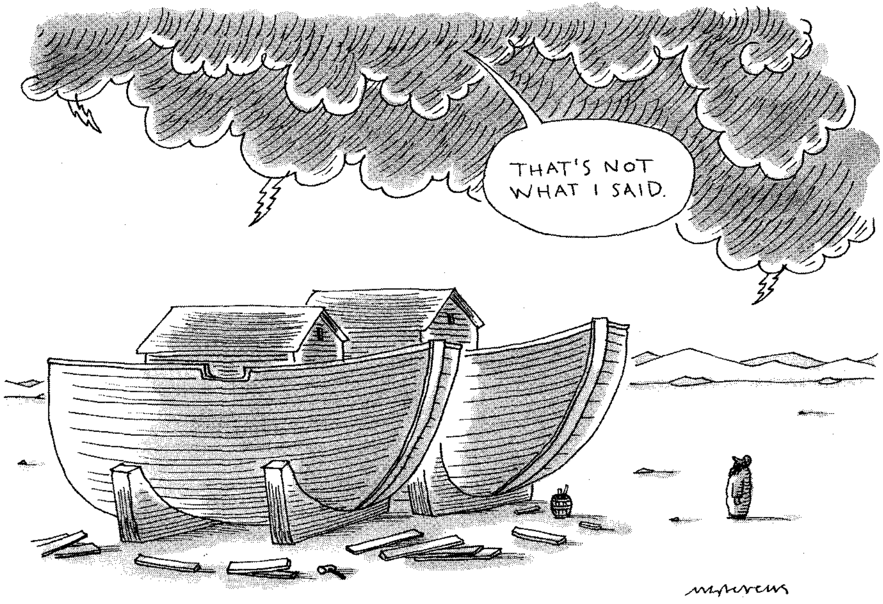
In light of Polanski's checkered personal history, his decision to sue for injury to his reputation was presumptuous, to say the least. This was especially true because Polanski was what's known as a "libel tourist," who was using Britain's libel laws, which favor the plaintiff, to sue an American magazine. Even more audaciously, Polanski declined to go to England, fearing extradition in his statutory-rape case. *Vanity Fair* asked the court to dismiss the lawsuit, but in February, 2005, the Law Lords, Britain's highest court, ruled that Polanski did not have to appear in person in order to pursue the case. (After a trial in which Polanski testified by video link, the jury awarded him about ninety thousand dollars.) The British decision was obviously not binding on an American court, but it suggested that he might be able to win in the United States, too, without showing up.

In December, 2008, the Polanski defense team filed a motion in L.A. County Superior Court, asking that the case be dismissed on the ground that Polanski had been deprived of due process of law. (The lawyers submitted Zenovich's documentary as an exhibit.) On February 17, 2009, Hummel appeared before Judge Peter Espinoza to argue the case. (The transcript noted, "Defendant Polanski not present in court.")

The diagnostic session at Chino, Hummel told Judge Espinoza, "was intended to be his entire sentence. . . . So this notion that somehow there was a fleeing from a sentence is not true." Hummel went on, "In our system, we simply cannot tolerate back-room communications between prosecutors and judges that influence a sentence and that cut out the defendant and his counsel from those communications. . . . That's at the heart of this request." Lawrence Silver joined in Polanski's motion, saying, "The time has come for this case to end, Your Honor."

The D.A.'s office responded with barely concealed rage. "This case is about a 44-year-old defendant who plied a 13-year-old girl with drugs and alcohol, then against her consent, committed acts of oral copulation, sodomy and sexual intercourse upon her," the attorneys wrote in a brief. "Petitioner's flight, whatever his motivations, and his failure to take responsibility for his crimes is at the heart of the extraordinary delays in this case."

Polanski's lawyer clearly made an impression on Judge Espinoza, who said that there had been "substantial . . . misconduct that occurred during the pendency of this case." Ultimately, though, he rejected Polanski's motion, under what is known as the "fugitive disentitlement doctrine." Espinoza ruled that Polanski "is not entitled to


THAT'S NOT WHAT I SAID.

request any affirmative relief from this Court, as he remains at large." Polanski's team asked a three-judge Court of Appeal panel to intervene, and on July 30th that court gave them a surprising victory. In a departure from its usual practice, the court directed Espinoza to show cause why he should not hold "an evidentiary hearing, without requiring [Polanski's] physical presence, to determine whether the case should be dismissed in furtherance of justice." The Court of Appeal may have been subtly inviting the trial court to throw out the prosecution. It was perhaps Polanski's biggest court victory in thirty-two years—and, in the upside-down world of his case, the worst thing that could have happened to him.

Steve Cooley, who was elected in 2000, is the fifth Los Angeles County district attorney to preside over the Polanski prosecution. Cooley first won the job as the law-and-order alternative to his predecessor, Gil Garcetti, who was widely criticized for his handling of several high-profile cases, most notably the O. J. Simpson trial. Notwithstanding the passion of Cooley's argument, Polanski appeared to be making progress in the courts in the summer of 2009. Cooley had to respond.

Over the years, the district attorney's efforts to bring Polanski back to the United States seem to have been halfhearted. According to a chronology released by the D.A.'s office, prosecutors have made only a handful of significant gestures to international authorities, and there have been long gaps in even this effort. (The chronology lists nothing, for example, during the periods 1982 to 1985, 1989 to 1993, and 1995 to 2004.) The first time a provisional request for Polanski's arrest in Switzerland was actually prepared was on September 22, 2009. E-mails obtained by the Associated Press show that prosecutors in Los Angeles tracked Polanski as he moved between Austria and Switzerland in late September and weighed which country had a better extradition arrangement with the United States. "I don't have experience with any Austrian extraditions so I don't know how 'friendly' they would be to extradition on such a case," Diana Carbajal, a deputy district attorney, wrote in one message. This sudden rush of interest ended with Polanski's arrest on the night of September 26th, as he arrived at the Zurich airport, to attend a ceremony in his honor at that city's film festival.

The timing clearly suggests that the Los Angeles District Attorney's office moved to arrest Polanski because he seemed to have a real possibility of winning in the courts. Cooley has said, "It's about completing justice. Justice is not complete when someone leaves the jurisdiction of the court." Polanski's lawyers thus have to wonder whether, by bringing the motion to dismiss the case, they effectively prompted their client's arrest. Did Polanski's motion, meritorious though it might be, backfire? "There was prosecutorial misconduct and we felt we had to bring it to the court's attention," Dalton told me. "We had to do it."

You would not believe what Bobby Baxter wants for Christmas!
YENTA CLAUS
Shanahan

After Polanski's arrest, the value of his celebrity went through its most precipitate rise and fall. Polanski's friends, many of them also celebrities, swept in with public, fervent support. The S.A.C.D., the French dramatic writers' guild, sponsored a petition, which said that Polanski had been arrested "in a case of morals." It went on, "Filmmakers in France, in Europe, in the United States and around the world are dismayed by this decision. It seems inadmissible to them that an international cultural event, paying homage to one of the greatest contemporary filmmakers, is used by the police to apprehend him." Signers included Woody Allen, Martin Scorsese, Pedro Almodóvar, and eventually several hundred others from around the world. Bernard-Henri Lévy organized another petition, drawing support from Steven Soderbergh, Neil Jordan, Sam Mendes, Diane von Furstenberg, and Mike Nichols as well as Salman Rushdie and Milan Kundera. This one said, "We ask the Swiss courts to free him immediately and not to turn this ingenious filmmaker into a martyr of a politico-legal imbroglio that is unworthy of two democracies like Switzerland and the United States. Good sense, as well as honor, require it." Nicolas Sarkozy, the French President, called Polanski's arrest "not a good administration of justice." The producer Harvey Weinstein wrote about Polanski's "so-called crime."

With equal rapidity, an anti-Polanski backlash swept in. The petitions made no reference to the facts of the case, no acknowledgment of the seriousness of his crime, and no recognition that sex with a child—the rape of a child—was worthy of condemnation. Columnists across the political spectrum, from feminists on the left to conservatives on the right, found common cause in revulsion at both Polanski and his famous friends. Katha Pollitt wrote in *The Nation*, "It's enraging that literary superstars who go on and on about human dignity, and human rights, and even women's rights (at least when the women are Muslim) either don't see what Polanski did as rape, or don't care, because he is, after all, Polanski—an artist like themselves." The *Wall Street Journal's* drama critic wrote, "Anyone who lives in a tightly sealed echo chamber of self-congratulation, surrounded by yes-men who are dedicated to doing what he wants, is bound to lose touch with reality." Polanski's public supporters, from Sarkozy to Weinstein, decided to discuss the matter no further. In the court of public opinion, the backlash won. The legalities were left to the Swiss courts.

As in the United States, the advantage in the legal battle in Switzerland shifted, over time, to Polanski. He was initially denied bail—understandably, as there was a "risk of flight"—and incarcerated in a small prison, built around a stone-paved courtyard. He could see the tops of a few trees and a bit of the sky from the barred window of his cell, and was allowed an hour of exercise per day. On October 2nd, Dalton, Hummel, and Reid Weingarten, a Washington lawyer, met with Justice Department officials to ask them not to make a formal extradition request. The lawyers did not succeed, but the official demand for extradition did not go to the Swiss until three weeks later. Polanski's lawyers put together a package of guarantees that included electronic monitoring and most of his personal financial assets, and that persuaded an appellate court to release him to his chalet. His legal challenges to the extradition order have only just begun, and probably will not be resolved until next spring.

"I take the fun out of everything. What do you do?"

Still, it appears likely that at some point Polanski will be returned to California, and there he will face a legal situation of daunting complexity. So much time has passed that it is difficult to know for sure how a court today would apply the rules in effect in 1977. Some sort of settlement—an agreement on a short prison term, perhaps—remains a theoretical possibility, but according to one member of Polanski's camp, "We have basically given up on making any sort of deal with Cooley. He won't talk to us." On December 10th, the Court of Appeal will hear arguments on the question of whether an evidentiary hearing can be held in Polanski's absence. If the court grants such a hearing, Polanski will be able to call prosecutors to the witness stand, including perhaps Cooley himself. The prospect of a hearing about government misconduct may bring the district attorney's office to the bargaining table at last.

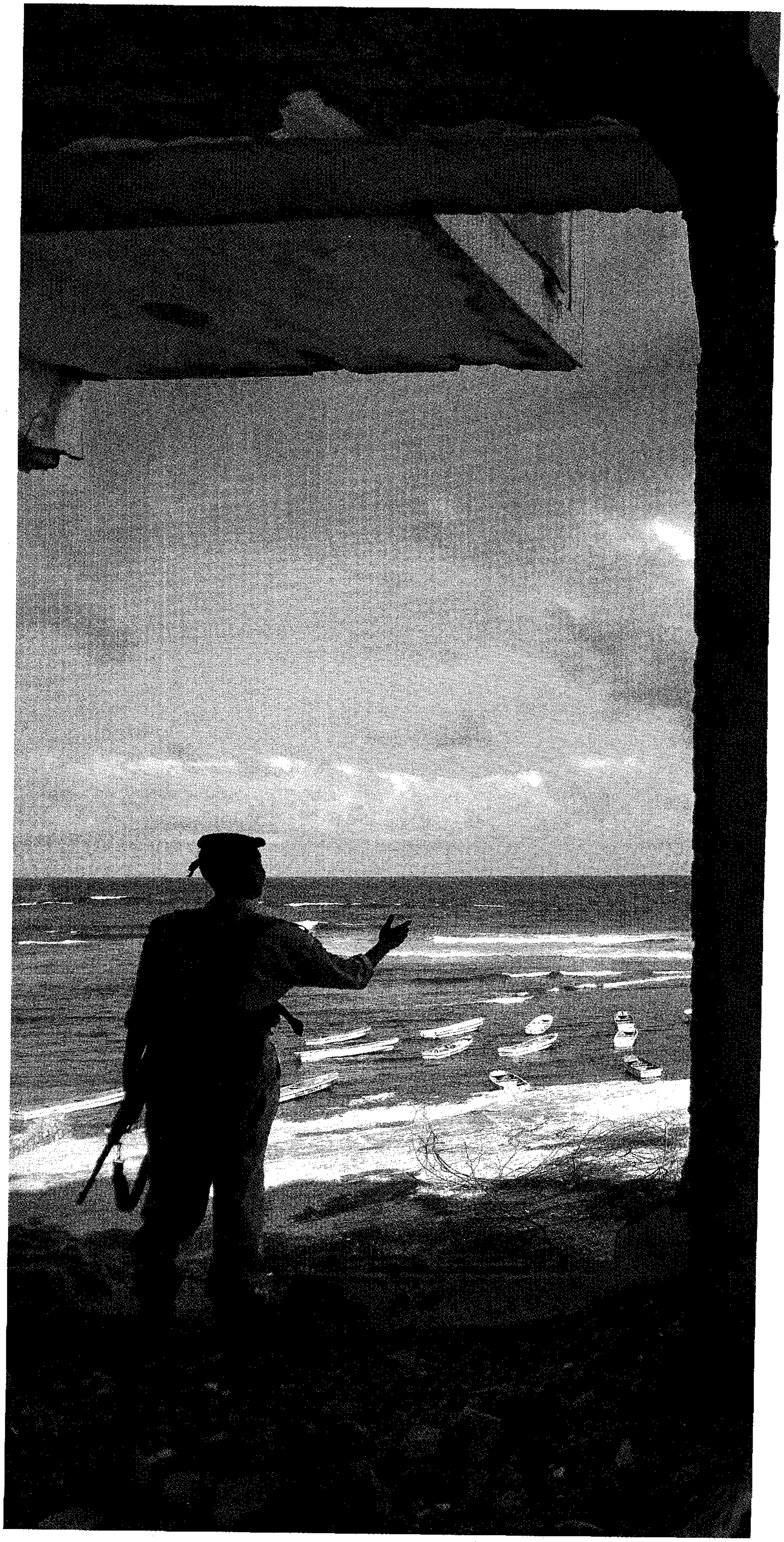
If Polanski were to lose his case in the Court of Appeal, the advantage would shift to Cooley. A trial may be complicated, or perhaps even impossible, because the original file in the case went missing, and had to be re-created years later. It appears that Polanski will face some time in a California state prison upon his return: the extradition request stipulates, "The maximum time that Mr. Polanski could be sentenced to prison . . . is two years." Meanwhile, the director, who is wealthy but not nearly as rich as such near-contemporaries as Steven Spielberg and George Lucas, has had lawyers in Paris, Zurich, Washington, Los Angeles, and Dallas, where Dalton's son works on the case.

Polanski will await the next turn in his own story in the elegant confines of Milky Way, which has a spectacular view of the Alps. Shortly before his arrest, Polanski had nearly finished editing his latest film, "The Ghost," a political thriller starring Ewan McGregor, Pierce Brosnan, and Kim Cattrall. The story concerns a former Prime Minister of Great Britain, whose troubled tenure leads him to settle in the United States to write his memoirs. According to the trailer, the protagonist's flight into exile came about because of "one decision I made . . . which wasn't in the interests of the U.S.A." It is Polanski's first film since "Chinatown" to be set primarily in the United States, but, given his legal difficulties, he had to use locations in Germany as substitutes for the New England setting. Through intermediaries, Polanski worked on the post-production process from his prison cell, and he will complete the project from the more congenial surroundings of his vacation home. Given the vertiginous shifts in fortune that he has endured throughout his life, Polanski is well suited to live with the current uncertainties, and the movie will be released, on schedule, early next year. ♦

Late this summer, after meeting with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Nairobi, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, the President of Somalia, flew home to Mogadishu, the country's capital, aboard a chartered propeller plane. The Mogadishu airport is little more than a runway alongside the beach at the southern edge of the city. The plane, which had flown three hours over a largely uninhabited arid wilderness, came to a halt in front of a tiny terminal building; a crashed jet lay crumpled, nose forward, nearby. There were soldiers everywhere. A group of women in long dresses and colorful turbans began chanting greetings as Sharif, a slim, youthful man of forty-five, climbed from the plane. But in less than five minutes the welcoming ceremonies were over, and Sharif had taken his place inside a Toyota Land Cruiser with smoked-glass windows, flanked by armored personnel carriers, each with two machine gunners manning open turrets. I had accompanied Sharif on the flight, and was hustled into the back of an A.P.C., which had pulled up close to the plane, by one of Sharif's advisers, who said that he had orders to keep me out of sight.

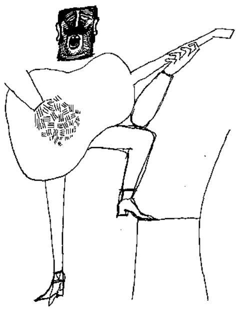
We drove into a city that was beat-up and bone-white from the sun and a coating of dust. Peacekeepers from the African Union Mission in Somalia, or AMISOM, and skinny Somali militiamen wearing red-and-white checked kaffiyehs and armed with Kalashnikovs stood watch as we passed. Gunmen had sealed off side streets with "technicals," Somali battlewagons made from pickup trucks; one had a massive recoilless rifle mounted on the back. We zigzagged around concrete blast barriers, through two sets of security gates, and then we were inside the Presidential compound, known as Villa Somalia.

Clinton had called Sharif the "best hope" for his country in some time. But what Sharif presided over could scarcely be considered a government. After nineteen years of war, much of Somalia remains an open battlefield. Downtown Mogadishu is overlaid with a deceptive grid of empty streets—rectangles crisscrossed with footpaths and studded with ruins. Most buildings had either been wrecked, like the Cathedral, or, like the old Parliament, had vanished. There is a small cluster of what were once eight-to-ten-story hotels and office buildings, of a style that was fashionable forty years ago. They are unoccupied,



A Somali police officer looks out from the remains of the Al Uraba Hotel, in Mogadishu, in a

ransacked shells, frozen in time. In July, the Shabaab, a group of violent Islamist guerrillas, advanced through the city to within a few hundred yards of Villa Somalia before being halted by AMISOM. (AMISOM, a force of four thousand three hundred Ugandan and Burundian soldiers, has been stationed in Somalia since early 2007; the African Union provides the soldiers, and the United Nations pays the bill.) Sharif's government survived, but so did the Shabaab. His writ truly held only within the enclaves guarded by the peacekeepers: the airport, the seaport, and Villa Somalia. Everything else was contested.



Last Thursday, an explosion ripped through a graduation ceremony for medical and engineering students at the Shamo hotel, near the AMISOM base, in an area under the loose security umbrella afforded by the peacekeepers. There were reports that the blast—presumably ordered by the Shabaab—was set off by a male suicide bomber disguised as a woman. The bomb killed at least nineteen people, including three cabinet members, two journalists, and several students from Benadir University, a college founded by a group of Somali physicians in 2002. A young Presidential aide, Yasin Bashir, sent me an e-mail shortly afterward, calling it the government's "worst day" thus far. "It's not unfamiliar in Mogadishu to watch or hear an explosion," he said, "but it's unbelievable to kill three key ministers in one occasion." The cabinet members were the ministers for education, culture and higher education, and health. Notably, all three were diaspora Somalis, who had returned and joined the government. The health minister, a woman named Qamar Adan Ali, was "well educated and also a British citizen," Bashir told me. Dahir Mohamud Gelle, Sharif's information minister, called the bombing a "national disaster."

The Shabaab (the name means "the youth") has ties to Al Qaeda, and in the areas it controls—most of the southern part of the country, including a large swath of Mogadishu—it has imposed its own harsh form of Sharia, or Islamic law, with punishments such as public flogging, stoning, and amputation. Last year, in the port of Kismayo, a young girl accused of adultery was buried up to her neck in the field of a soccer stadium packed with spectators, and then stoned to death; her family said that she was only thirteen years old and had in fact been gang-raped. This summer, in the ancient coastal town of Merka, the Shabaab decreed that gold and silver dental fillings were un-Islamic, and dispatched patrols to yank them out of people's mouths.

The group has also targeted foreigners. In July, two French intelligence agents who were in Mogadishu to train Sharif's security ministry were kidnapped in broad daylight, with the apparent collusion of their bodyguards. One of the Frenchmen later escaped; the Shabaab said that it would try the other one for the crimes of espionage and conspiracy.

Just a few weeks before our flight to Mogadishu, the Obama Administration had let it be known that it had given Sharif's government forty tons of arms, and that it intended to send forty tons more. French and U.S. military personnel were also said to be training Somali security forces in nearby Djibouti, where the United States maintains an airfield and a small military force as part of AFRICOM, the U.S. military command for Africa. This was a remarkable turn of events. As recently as two years ago, sending American arms to Sharif would have been unthinkable—he was a Western pariah, the titular head of the Islamic Courts Union, or I.C.U., an amalgam of local Islamic Sharia courts. The Courts, formed to rein in Somalia's anarchy after years of clan-based warfare, had evolved into an armed movement that encompassed extremists linked to Al Qaeda. The Shabaab itself had grown out of the Courts. Sharif and his allies had taken power by defeating warlords who were supported by the United States.

The Bush Administration had gone so far as to contemplate killing Sharif, according to a Western official who has worked in Somalia for many years. In December, 2006, "Sharif headed south with some bad guys," the official said, naming three jihadis linked to Al Qaeda who were on America's wanted list. "These were people the Americans were keeping a close eye on, and Sheikh Sharif was with them." The U.S. was planning air strikes to target the men. "In the State Department, there was some back-and-forth over whether or not he was a good guy and could be rescued, or left to die along with the others in the air strikes." One camp believed that "Sharif's attitude made him a bad guy," the official said, while others argued that "diplomacy hadn't really been attempted." (The State Department had no comment.)

In the end, Sharif wasn't killed. As the official described it, a schism in the Courts movement was what ultimately saved him. His faction eventually broke with the more extreme wing; he favored political compromise, and lobbied to have the word "jihad" taken out of the Courts' charter. Suddenly, Sharif was seen as useful: the good Islamist. "U.S. policy changed," the official said, "and now Sharif is the chosen one."

When Sharif met with Hillary Clinton in Nairobi, she was just beginning a seven-nation African tour. "The U.S., Kenya, the entire region, and the global community have a stake in the success of President Sheikh Sharif's government," Clinton told reporters. She warned that the Shabaab was trying to turn Somalia, a Muslim nation, into a staging ground for terrorism. Somalia's Foreign Minister at the time, Mohammad Abdullahi Omaar, then spoke of the "personal rapport" between Clinton and Sharif, and Michael Ranneberger, the U.S. Ambassador to Kenya, who is also in charge of relations with Somalia, described Sharif as "the most visionary leader Somalia has had."

Before Sharif's encounter with Clinton, there had been a great deal of media speculation about whether Sharif, as a devout Muslim, would publicly shake a woman's hand. In the end, Sharif smiled and warmly extended his hand to Clinton. When I spoke to Sharif, I asked how he had decided to go ahead with the handshake. The President exchanged a faint smile with his close friend and adviser Hassan Moallim Sheikh Ali, who was translating for us, and began talking about what the Koran had to say on the subject. One verse suggested that the Prophet objected to men shaking hands with women, but another depicted him doing so himself. "And when there is such a conflict there is no authority," Sharif said.

"There are many religious scholars who consider handshakes as a normal thing, and they base their arguments on whether the touch is conducted for reasons of lust or not,” he went on. “My personal view on this point is that Hillary Clinton came to see me with the good intention of helping the Somali people. There are always people that do not want Somalia to get out of this impasse, so they will dwell on this.” The meeting with Clinton, Sharif felt, was an opportunity that had to be seized.

“This religion is a tolerant religion, and not as austere as those that came before it,” Sharif said. Devout Somalis now realized that the Shabaab and Al Qaeda had exploited their faith; previously, because of their isolation, they had not fully understood this, he said.

And yet, this past April, Sharif’s Parliament voted unanimously to expand the legal system to include Sharia. He told me that imposing Sharia was one of the Shabaab’s main demands, and so “they can have no excuse for continuing the war.” He paused, and said, “Actually, they will not be satisfied whatever we do, but it will erode their support among the people.”

Sharif said that the international figure he most admired was Nelson Mandela. I remarked that to many people Mandela was a kind of living saint. Sharif looked perplexed. After a back-and-forth with his friend, he said, “The thing is that in Islam we have no saints like that. Just martyrs. But I understand what you mean.”

With shade trees and walkways edged by flower beds, Villa Somalia bears some resemblance to a small community-college campus. It sits on a high bluff overlooking the city center and the port, and consists of five large villas, ranging in style from late Art Deco to sixties modernist: the President’s office; his residence; the Speaker of the House’s office; a large villa where ministers and advisers now live; and a guesthouse, where I was lodged in a suite with an extraordinary view of the Indian Ocean. I was told that Idi Amin Dada, Henry Kissinger, and Andrei Gromyko had stayed there. Trash and discarded tank shells were scattered around an untended orchard; amid the trees, there were soldiers, tents, and gun emplacements.

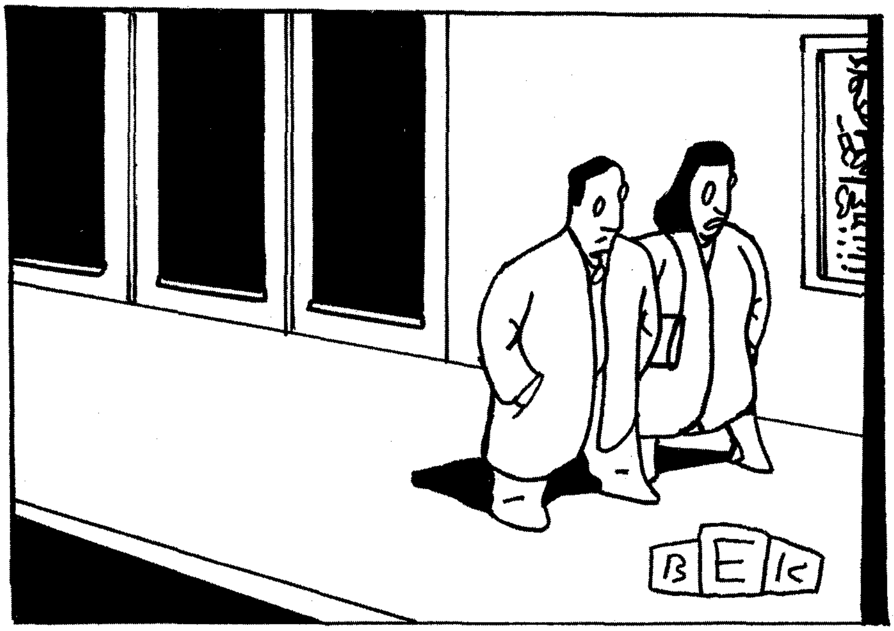
Villa Somalia had been the official residence of Somalia’s Italian colonial administrators. Italian troops had invaded in the eighteen-nineties, and by the nineteen-thirties, with Mussolini in power, Somalia had been subsumed into a colony that also included present-day Ethiopia and Eritrea. The Italians built roads and railways, but the Second World War brought an end to all that. In 1960, after a few years under British military rule, and then as a U.N. trusteeship, Somalia gained its independence. The Italians handed Villa Somalia over to the country’s first President, Adan Abdulle Osman, in a ceremony held in the garden.

Osman proved to be a statesman of exceptional honesty and modesty. In 1967, he voluntarily stepped down—the first post-colonial African leader to do so. His Prime Minister, Abdirashid Ali Shermarke, ruled for two years before being assassinated by a bodyguard. (His son, Omar Abdirashid Ali Shermarke, is now Sharif’s Prime Minister; he told me that, when he was a boy, a giraffe roamed Villa Somalia’s grounds freely, and a crocodile lived in its pond.) The assassination triggered a military coup by Major General Mohamed Siad Barre, who set Somalia on a Socialist course. In 1977, Siad Barre launched a war against Ethiopia over control of the Ogaden Desert. For a time, the Soviets aided both sides, but the Kremlin soon favored Ethiopia’s revolutionary junta. As Soviet arms and Cuban soldiers flooded into Ethiopia, Siad Barre aligned himself with the United States, and the Horn of Africa became a Cold War battleground. By the late nineteen-eighties, Somalia had become a major recipient of U.S. foreign aid.

Somalia began to fragment as regional guerrilla movements, most of them based around clans, took up arms. Siad Barre responded with brute force; in 1988, his Air Force bombed the northern city of Hargeisa, killing several thousand civilians. But in 1991, as rival-clan militias fought for control of Mogadishu, Siad Barre fled into exile.

Amid fighting and drought, tens of thousands of Somalis died of starvation. In 1992, President George H. W. Bush sent troops into Somalia to protect relief shipments that the militiamen were plundering. In October, 1993, two U.S. Black Hawk helicopters were shot down, and in the ensuing chaos eighteen servicemen were killed. After Somalis were shown on television dragging the mutilated bodies of two American soldiers through the streets, President Clinton, who had been in office for just nine months, withdrew U.S. forces.

Somalia is now the archetypal failed state. Its nineteen-hundred-mile-long coastline has become a base for pirates, who have grown increasingly aggressive. Piracy has become a byword for Somalia’s lawlessness. Last week, pirates hijacked the Maran Centaurus, a Greek supertanker carrying crude oil to the U.S. from Saudi Arabia, with twenty-eight crew members on board. It was the second time in a year that pirates had seized a supertanker. A year ago, the Saudi-owned Sirius Star, which was carrying a hundred million



“Isn’t Jim Carrey getting too old to make Jim Carrey movies?”

dollars' worth of oil, was taken; the ship and its crew were released after a reported ransom of three million dollars was paid.

Pirates are holding at least a dozen vessels off the Somali coast, with as many as two hundred hostages. They include a British couple whose yacht was hijacked near the Seychelles, more than eight hundred miles from Somalia, in October. The pirates are demanding a multimillion-dollar ransom.

The Somali government exerts no control over its territorial waters. I asked Admiral Farah Ahmed Omaar, who bears the title of Commander of the Somali Navy, if he worked with the anti-pirate flotillas from various navies—the American, French, and Norwegian—policing the Indian Ocean. He shook his head: "No. So far, the government has not made these sorts of contacts, to my knowledge."

"What is the Somali Navy today?" I asked.

"Nothing," the Admiral acknowledged. "Practically nothing."

Farah, who is in his sixties, had been trained at the naval academy in Baku, in what was then the Soviet Union, and at Saddam Hussein's military college in Iraq. He was now rebuilding the Navy from scratch. After a recruiting drive on Somali radio and in newspapers, he had enlisted five hundred young men, who were about to finish a four-month training course. It was rudimentary—"Drilling, swimming, basic rules of the sea."

Lately, Somalia's problems seem to have reached a critical mass. A million and a half people, out of a population that's believed to be around nine million, are internal refugees. Another million or so have fled abroad, to Yemen, Kenya, and Uganda, and to countries as far away as Finland, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States, where there is a Somali émigré community of thirty thousand in Minnesota.

Twenty or so Somali-American youngsters from the Twin Cities have gone missing only to surface in Somalia, fighting for the Shabaab. They are thought to have been recruited through mosques and Islamist Web sites. Three months ago, a Somali-American from Seattle drove a truck bomb into an AMISOM base in Mogadishu, killing twenty-one peacekeepers and himself. This fall, when Sharif made his first trip to America, he stopped in New York, to attend the U.N. General Assembly, and in Minneapolis-St. Paul. There, he met Senator Al Franken, and he promised the parents of the runaways that he would do his utmost to "bring them all home."

The number of people in Somalia who are dependent on international food aid has tripled since 2007, to an estimated 3.6 million. But there is no permanent foreign expatriate presence in southern Somalia, because the Shabaab has declared war on the U.N. and on Western nongovernmental organizations. International relief supplies are flown or shipped into the country and distributed, wherever possible, through local relief workers. Insurgents routinely attack and murder them, too; forty-two have been killed in the past two years alone.

The U.N.'s Special Representative to Somalia is Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, a Mauritanian-born diplomat. I spoke with him in Nairobi, where he is based. He argued that the U.N. should establish a secure enclave in Mogadishu: "You have a Green Zone in Baghdad, so why not one in Mogadishu? Maybe we can call it the White Zone." The U.N.'s returning would "put pressure on the West," he said. "We must find a way to be close to the victims." But he admitted that aid efforts had left him frustrated: "Somalia is just as bad as it has ever been, perhaps worse. I know that it is politically incorrect to say so, but there can be no humanitarian 'emergency' that should continue for twenty years—it's a contradiction in terms."

"The situation is catastrophic," a regional analyst in Nairobi told me. She confessed that she didn't know what to do anymore. She found herself wondering if, since all else had failed, it might be best just to leave Somalia to its own devices.

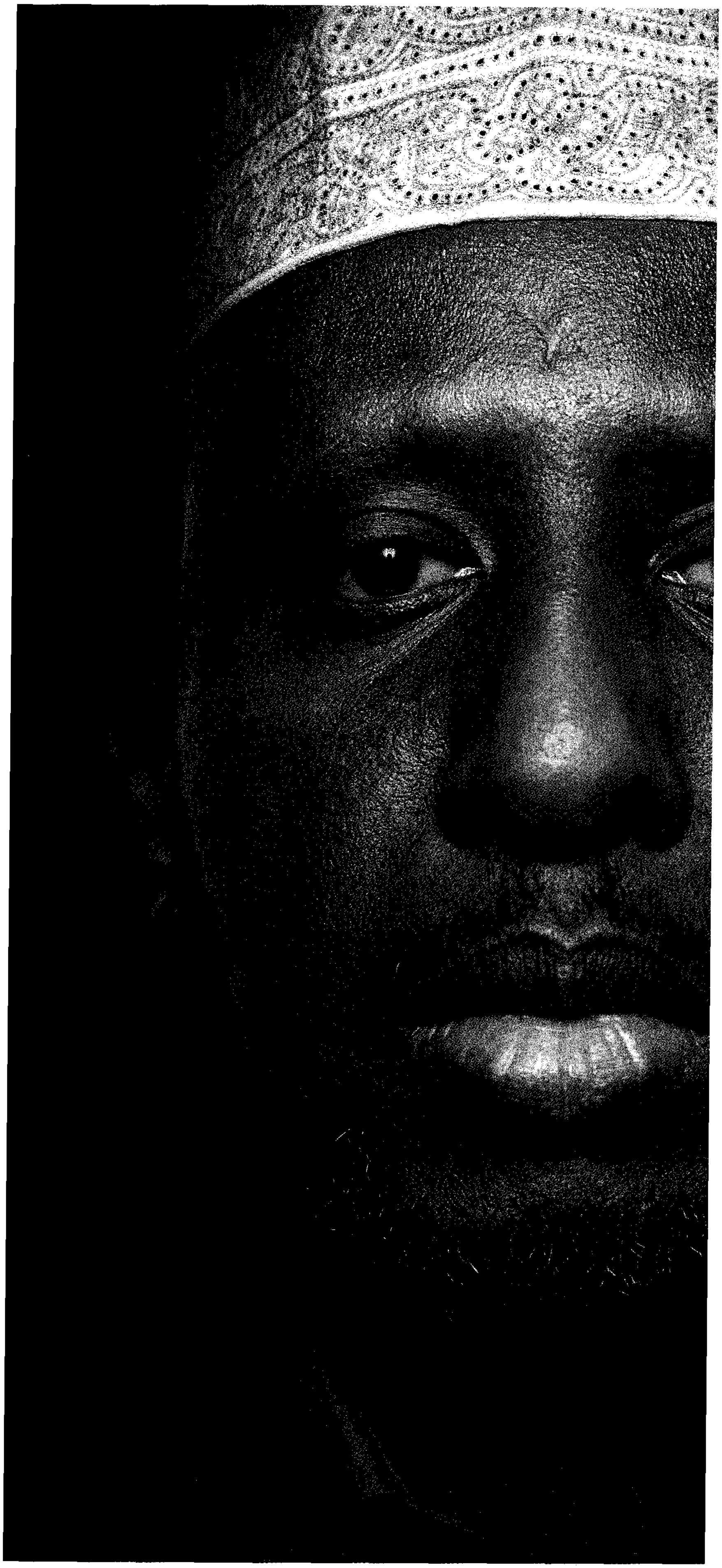
For others, abandoning the country poses unacceptable risks. "The international community really has no other choice than to support Sharif's government," the Western official said. "The cost of not supporting it far outweighs the cost of doing so. If this government falls, we're going to have a patchwork of forces, dominated by the Shabaab, which will provide a toehold to Al Qaeda and other foreign fighters. If this were to happen, it would be a real mess—and not just for Somalia. The neighboring states would start supporting proxy forces, and this region will become a cauldron." He added, "Circumstances have placed Sheikh Sharif in a position where he is the logical man. There's really no one else."

"After the collapse of the Somali state, I applied for a place at university in Sudan," Sheikh Sharif told me. We were in his office, which had been outfitted by the former dictator Siad Barre. It was simply furnished, with peach-colored walls, windows shrouded with dark silk, and brown and white octagonal tiles on the floor.

Sharif comes from a family of Sufi scholars. In 1992, at the age of twenty-eight, he was accepted by the University of Kordofan, in a remote Sudanese province, in the shadow of the Nuba Mountains. But repeated bouts of malaria left him too exhausted to study for exams. "My teachers said that I should go elsewhere, somewhere not malaria-infested; and so I decided to go to Libya, where I applied for law school." In 1994, he moved to Libya, and stayed there for six years, studying for degrees in civil and Sharia law. Back in Mogadishu, he was jarred by the country's anarchy. "I tried to mobilize people, and to share my views with like-minded people," he told me.

In 2002, he went to southern Somalia to work for Muhammad Dhere, a warlord who belonged to his clan, the Hawiye. (It is the largest of Somalia's clans, and has traditionally controlled Mogadishu.) Sharif tried to set up a court, but he had trouble with Dhere: "We could not agree over the issue of judicial independence." He returned to Mogadishu and began teaching at a primary school. Murders, robberies, and kidnappings had become commonplace. When one of his students, a twelve-year-old boy, was kidnapped, Sharif and the school principal assumed responsibility for rescuing him. They managed to free the student and other kidnap victims—"without bloodshed," Sharif said. "That's when we came to the idea of establishing the Islamic Courts."

His court put an end to the banditry in its area of jurisdiction, he said. "I was elected as its chairman. It was difficult for me to accept the position, because there was lawlessness in Mogadishu and it was a very challenging scenario. I was torn between accepting and declining, but I realized that, if I declined, the mobilization that I had kicked off would die. So I



President Sharif "has surfed political trends from extremism back to moderation,"

"You haven't enjoyed the Yule log till you've enjoyed it in high def."

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accepted. And that was the most important decision I made in my life." Soon, similar courts were being set up throughout southern Somalia. At a gathering of Courts leaders in a Mogadishu hotel, Sharif urged them to unite their efforts. "In a chaotic place, you need to use force to stop criminal activities," he explained, "so it was a natural part of the program."

Sharif was referring to the moment at which the Islamic Courts became an armed militia. "So to be involved in politics in Somalia means going to war?" I asked him.

"Without a doubt," Sharif said.

In June, 2006, Sharif and his allies in the Courts seized Mogadishu, driving an alliance of warlords from the city. The defeated warlords had been receiving covert aid from the C.I.A., because of American concerns that Somalia had become a haven for terrorists. (The C.I.A. declined to comment on the specifics of any operations in Somalia, but a spokesman said, "Preventing the emergence of new terrorist safe havens for Al Qaeda and shutting down those that currently exist is an obvious priority.") The Courts imposed Taliban-style prohibitions on television and recorded music, and instituted punishments dictated by Sharia. They also brought security to the capital, reopening the airport and the seaport. Commerce rebounded. But by January, 2007, they had been chased out again, by an Ethiopian invasion force that was endorsed by the U.N. and tacitly supported by the U.S.

Ambassador Ranneberger told me that he made two overtures to Sharif during this period, and that both had been spurned. In September, 2006, he and Sharif met. "I was authorized to tell him that if the Islamic Courts Union would eschew terrorism and Islamic extremism we could work with him," Ranneberger said. "We raised the issue of the high-value targets"—Al Qaeda leaders sought by America. "We mentioned them to him by name, and we told him that we hoped the Islamic Courts would not associate with them and, on the contrary, would take action against them. He listened and nodded and seemed to understand. But then he went back to Mogadishu and I never heard from him again. I guess he had no traction there."

Six months later, Ranneberger said, the U.S. offered to help Sharif secure safe passage as the invading Ethiopian forces advanced. Sharif refused his help, and fled across the border to Kenya, where the police took him into custody. "I met with him again and asked him to make a statement against extremism," Ranneberger said. "He said he would, but he didn't."

"When Ranneberger asked Sharif to denounce the terrorists, this was something he couldn't do," Hussein Sheikh Ali, Sharif's liaison to AMISOM, told me. "Politically, it would have been suicide." The I.C.U. was falling apart, and Sharif "would have lost the public support of the Somalis and he could never have come politically as far as he has come. If they could have, the Shabaab would have killed him, too," he said. "It was a year later—quite late—before he said in public that the Shabaab are not part of our struggle."

Sharif remained in Kenyan custody until February, 2007. Then, free to go, he and his allies gathered in Eritrea, where they recast themselves as a nationalist resistance movement fighting a jihad against Western "crusaders." Ethiopia's occupation forces were soon beset by suicide bombings and I.E.D. attacks.

Finally, in U.N.-sponsored peace talks concluded in Djibouti last January, the Ethiopians agreed to withdraw, and Sharif agreed to stop fighting. Ranneberger helped broker the deal. He told me that, in spite of his frustrated early overtures, he had always had a "high opinion" of Sharif. ("I think he has a vision, is committed, and is a reasonable individual who wants to have a stable Somalia.") Somalia's Parliament, its number doubled by the addition of Sharif's representatives, voted for a new government. Sharif won.

Before Sharif could consolidate his forces, the Shabaab declared war on him. His old allies had opposed any negotiated settlement. Two weeks after Sharif assumed the Presidency, the Shabaab sent suicide bombers into the AMISOM base in Mogadishu, killing eleven people. Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, a veteran Somali jihadi who had been Sharif's senior partner in the Courts, merged his Hezbul Islam militia with the Shabaab and became its "spiritual leader." He vowed to continue the war until Sharia law was declared and all "foreigners and apostates" had left Somalia. Osama bin Laden called upon the world's Muslims to support the Shabaab.

During my stay at Villa Somalia, a running joke among Sharif's aides was that I was their special guest under house arrest. It had been only a few weeks since the French intelligence agents were abducted. A visit to the seaport was conducted as if it were a military operation: I rode inside an AMISOM armored personnel carrier, in a convoy with three other A.P.C.s and several jeeps mounted with machine guns.

Outside the gates of Villa Somalia, the city teemed with young men, mostly lounging around. A few ran up and tried to peer through the slits at the side of my A.P.C. I saw no cars, just donkey carts. Stevedores pushed makeshift wooden barrows, with wheels made of car tires. Many of the men wore turbans and lungis—Somali sarongs. We pulled up in front of a low, sandbagged building that AMISOM was using as a base. Inside, some officers were eating banana mash and rice. They did not want me to proceed further. As a compromise, they called in the acting port administrator, who introduced himself as Yasin Osman.

Osman reckoned that, of ten ships that made it to port, three had had an incident involving pirates: "Some are attacked and escape; others are captured, their cargo looted, and are ransomed." The U.N.'s food-aid shipments—sent on cargo vessels out of the Kenyan port of Mombasa, to the south—managed to get through only because they were now being escorted by foreign naval flotillas.

I asked him what sort of cargo came ashore.

"All kinds of cargo, everything. You can bring a bomb in if you want." He added, "What I mean is that this country has had no government for a long time."

A few days later, the AMISOM officers called me to their office in Villa Somalia. There were five young men seated in chairs against one wall, under the watchful eye of a Ugandan officer and a Somali man who introduced himself as Colonel Mao, a counterintelligence officer. The young men—all of whom wore lungis, except one, who wore Western trousers—were introduced to me as defectors from Hezbul Islam, the group that fought alongside the Shabaab.

The five youths began arguing among themselves, and with Colonel Mao, in Somali. Colonel Mao explained that they were angry because they had not been warned that they would be meeting a foreigner. I assured them that I wished only to hear why they had been fighting against the government. The one wearing trousers spoke up. "We were fighting to raise up our Holy Book and to make our religion strong, and also to use our Holy Book as guidance according to Sharia," he said.

"What kind of Somalia would you like to see in the future?" I asked.

"Somalia at peace, developing its infrastructure, restored to its former glories . . ."

"Would you like people from the West, even from America, to come?"

"Sure," one of the youths said. "I even want to go to America myself."

I asked the man in trousers what they would have done if they had come across me when they were with the Shabaab.

"We would have eaten you!" He laughed, and so did the others.

"Would you have beheaded me?"

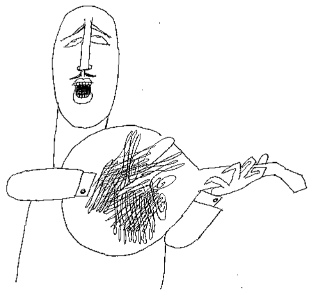
"Yes."

"But not now, not anymore?"

He paused, and thought about this for a long moment. He had begun to say something when Colonel Mao interrupted to exclaim, "Peace and prosperity! That's what we want! Peace and prosperity!"

Two days after his return from Nairobi, Sharif convened a press conference at Villa Somalia. An unruly throng of about thirty reporters, photographers, and bloggers came. Journalists are frequently the targets of violence in Somalia; nine have been killed this year. Foreign journalists have also been murdered. Amanda Lindhout, a Canadian reporter, and Nigel Brennan, an Australian photographer, were released last week after being held in abysmal conditions for more than a year. Their families paid a reported million-dollar ransom. Lindhout and Brennan both said they had been tortured. Still, there are scores of Somali news Web sites and five television networks, as well as ten newspapers in Mogadishu alone.

Sharif walked in and took a seat at the end of a wooden conference table. No one stood up. A young woman in a head scarf called out, "Hillary Clinton promised you security assistance. Did she only give you weapons to destroy your country, or did she also ask you about reconciliation?" Sharif delivered a quiet, diplomatic response. Another reporter asked, "When you were chairman of the I.C.U., you used to say there was no Al Qaeda in Somalia. When did you realize they were here?" Sharif answered, "When Osama bin Laden told the Shabaab to fight me, and they said yes!" The reporters laughed.



Later, speaking of the woman reporter, a Sharif aide explained, "She lives in a Shabaab-controlled area. A lot of the reporters do. They have to frame their questions like that so as not to have problems later."

Muhammed Sheikh, the intelligence chief for Sharif's government, had told me that he relied on a network of informants who lived in Shabaab-controlled areas; they relayed their information through quick cell-phone calls. The informants faced beheading if they were caught, and in the nearby city of Baidoa alone, Sheikh said, forty had been killed since the spring. Their executions were filmed and posted on jihadi Web sites. The messages that accompanied them were usually in Arabic rather than in the Somali language, he said; they were intended to advertise the Shabaab's prowess in the Arab world, in a bid for donations and volunteers.

After the press conference, I joined Sharif in a living room at his private residence, which was decorated with brocaded blue-and-gold curtains and a deep-blue carpet. He wore a loose shirt, and slip-on shoes. At one point, there was a volley of gunshots outside. Sharif didn't blink. I asked him what it felt like to be the President of the world's ultimate failed state.

"When you lead people, you need power," Sharif said. "Power has different meanings. Ideas are power, and so is money and force. The state must have a combination of all of those to effect change. You need to serve your people, to protect your people, and to show them the way. And you are not only dealing with ordinary Somali people but with people who are quite destructive." Somalia, he said, "is not comparable to the rest of the world. The state does not have a monopoly on the use of violence—and the primary duty of the government is to bring security to its people. There are people who need to be dealt with before this can happen."

I could hear children's voices in another room, and asked Sharif how many children he had.

"Nine children, by the grace of God!" He smiled broadly.

Sharif had three wives. One of them, who lived in Yemen, visited during my stay. She occupied a suite in the guesthouse, and an extra detail of bodyguards had been posted at all the entrances and exits. I never saw her, but I saw the President come and go discreetly. Even within the Presidential compound, he moved by car, in his motorcade of black Land Cruisers, guarded by Ugandan troops.

The Ugandan AMISOM base was a dismal enclave of barriers, tents, and fuel depots, tucked into a labyrinth of weed-covered dunes just south of the airport. Ba-Hoku Barigye, a Ugandan Army major who had been educated in Cuba, took me to see the medical clinic that the Ugandans ran, which was open twice a week. In a hot, airless recess in the dunes, we found scores of thin Somali women, children, and old men—grouped by gender—waiting patiently.

The clinic was in a white-walled villa next door to a ruin. Inside, five Ugandan medics sat at plastic tables debriefing patients. In a cubicle that served as an ad-hoc operating theatre, a doctor extracted shrapnel from a man's head. The Somalis looked at me with passing curiosity. I asked one of the medics, who identified himself as Warrant Officer Plus Two Odicha Julius, which ailments he had been treating. "Respiratory-tract infections, intestinal problems, gunshot wounds, starvation," he said. "And chronic malnutrition among children under five."

Among the women, the most common complaints were pelvic inflammatory diseases and genital and urinary-tract infections. These were most often caused by the extreme form of genital mutilation that is practiced on Somali girls, involving the removal of not only the clitoris but the entire labia majora and minora, and usually performed with primitive instruments and without anesthesia.

As Barigye took me around, my eyes kept wandering over to the sea, thrillingly blue and just beyond the dunes. I asked him whether he had been to the beach. He shook his head and said, "No, and I haven't even thought about going, either."

We walked through the dunes to a series of tents that served as a field hospital. Somali patients, soldiers as well as civilians, lay on cots or on pads on the floor. A man whose arm had just been amputated smiled a greeting. His wife pointed to the stump where his arm had been and said, "Shabaab." In one tent, a young man lay on a cot, as two doctors urgently leaned over him; one pumped oxygen into his mouth from a primitive-looking hand-held squeeze bottle. The young man had a bleeding puncture wound in his stomach. Without looking up, one of the doctors said that he had been wounded by an I.E.D. About three minutes later, the young man died.

Barigye's mobile phone rang constantly. He always answered it, but usually hung up without speaking, or after just a few words. "It's the Shabaab," he said.

FROM THE LIVES OF MY FRIENDS

What are the birds called
in that neighborhood
The dogs

There were dogs flying
from branch to
branch

My friends and I climbed up the telephone poles to sit on the power lines
dressed like crows

Their voices sounded like lemons

They were a smooth sheet
They grew

black feathers

Not frightening at all
but beautiful, shiny, and
full of promise

What kind of light

is that?

—

The lives of my friends spend all of their time dying and coming back and
dying and coming back

They take a break in summer
to mow the piss
yellow lawns, blazing
front and
back

There is no break in winter

I am in love with the sisters of my friends
All that yellow hair!
Their arms
blazing

They lick their fingers
to wipe my face
clean

of everything

And I am glad
I am glad
I am

so glad

—

We will all be shipped away
in an icebox
with the one word OYSTERS
painted on the outside

Left alone, for once

None of my friends wrote novels or plays, from the lives of my friends came their lives

Here's what we did
we played in the yard outside
after dinner

and then
we were shipped away

That was fast—

stuffed
with

lemons

—*Michael Dickman*

"They have my number, and they call me all the time."

I asked Barigye what they said to him.

"Ah, just bullshit," he said. They threatened and cursed him, mostly; a few wanted to talk. Foreign fighters were among his regular callers. "Some of them are fugitives and have nowhere else to go but the Shabaab." There were a few Ugandans and at least one Rwandan, whom he believed was a Hutu, from the Interahamwe militia that had carried out the 1994 genocide. There was also a Burundian. "He tells me he left in '93, when he was ten, and that he ended up in Afghanistan and fought there, and then he fought in Iraq. And now he is here."

While we were speaking, Barigye had a short, contentious exchange with a Shabaab caller. "He said to me, 'I can see you, I can kill you now.' So I said, 'O.K., bring your gun.' He hung up."

Through a Somali friend, I arranged a meeting with a warlord named Bashir Rageh. In 2006, when the Courts seized Mogadishu, Rageh held a rally in a soccer stadium for his clansmen north of the city. At the rally, he accused the Courts of being a front for Al Qaeda-style extremists. In the *Times*, he was quoted as saying, "Our clan has agreed to defend our land, and we will fight the courts hiding under the cloak of Islam and trying to fool our people."

Rageh was a slim, good-looking man in his fifties. He wore a faded shirt and navy-blue trousers and an expensive watch. He was chewing gum, he explained, because he had forgotten his cigarettes. I read Rageh his quote from the *Times* and asked if he had changed his opinion of Sharif. He hummed theatrically for a moment, looking thoughtful. At length, he said, "Things are better now than they were."

Rageh went on, "You don't look back. In the countryside, there is a saying, 'Don't follow the footsteps of the morning,' meaning that if you do retrace your steps you will see only shit along the way. We all know what happened here, so we don't need to revisit it."

I asked Rageh if it was still fair to describe him as a warlord. "It depends on what you mean by 'warlord,'" he said. "Do you mean like an eighteenth-century warlord, or what?" The militiamen from his sub-clan, the Abgal, were being paid by the government, and so, technically, he no longer had a private militia. But they were still doing what they had always done: defending the area where he lived, and where they lived. Standing on the balcony of my suite, he pointed to a spot near the beach about two miles away, and said, "That's my house." He moved his finger imperceptibly to the left, and said, "That's the front line." His men were there. He had put them at the service of Sharif. "Now I play a backstage role."

According to Rageh, he had been on the American payroll from December, 2002, until June, 2006. After his defiant public rally, he had been airlifted out of Somalia by the C.I.A. I asked him about a C.I.A. program in which he and several other warlords had been tasked to capture and kill Al Qaeda suspects.

"That deal was the most important thing that ever happened to this country," Rageh said. "And it was not only to chase Al Qaeda here. It made us attempt something together. We failed, and we disappeared, and the extremists came, and it opened Pandora's box."

It has become an article of faith among Sharif's advisers that, before the Ethiopian invasion, they were duped by the Shabaab, and did not know the extent of its extremism or its ties to Al Qaeda. There is a certain amount of historical revisionism in such claims. Abdirahman Haji Adam, Somalia's Deputy Prime Minister, is an energetic man whom everyone calls Professor Ibbi. He was with Sharif in the days of the Courts. "I knew these people, the extremists," Professor Ibbi said. "We used to have meals together. We would argue. I would accuse them of being too extreme, and they used to say that I was against the ideas of 'young, progressive Muslims.' Back in 2006, I never thought they would actually go so far as to link up with Al Qaeda, as they have. I was Sheikh Sharif's spokesman, and when we were alone he and I used to talk about what they were saying, and their true intentions. We saw them doing things—summary justice, for example—which were un-Islamic, and we mistakenly said, 'Oh, let's leave them for now.' It was very unfortunate."

Yusuf Indhaccade, Sharif's deputy in defense matters, is a madrassa-educated fighter and a fervent Islamist. He looks like a Somali Thor—square-jawed and big-boned, with a mottled red face. I told him that, considering his own views, it was hard to believe he was unaware that some of his former comrades had joined Al Qaeda.

"We had our suspicions," Indhaccade said. To illustrate his claim of ignorance, he volunteered that he had protected three men—a Sudanese, a Somali-Kenyan, and a Comoran—whom the Americans had implicated in the 1998 bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, which killed at least two hundred and twenty-three people. "We believed they were innocent," he said. "They told us the Americans were just persecuting them because they were Muslims." Later, he had learned that they were, in fact, guilty. "They personally confirmed it to me," he said. "When their numbers grew, they grew more confident, too, and began boasting about what they had done." The Shabaab's fighters had their own communications systems, and foreigners coming to join them. "That's when I realized they had a link with Al Qaeda." By then, he said, it was too late to do anything about it. (The Sudanese had died, and the Kenyan had been detained in Sudan, he said, but the Comoran, as far as he knew, was still in Somalia.)

Farley Katz

"Everybody double your anti-depressants."

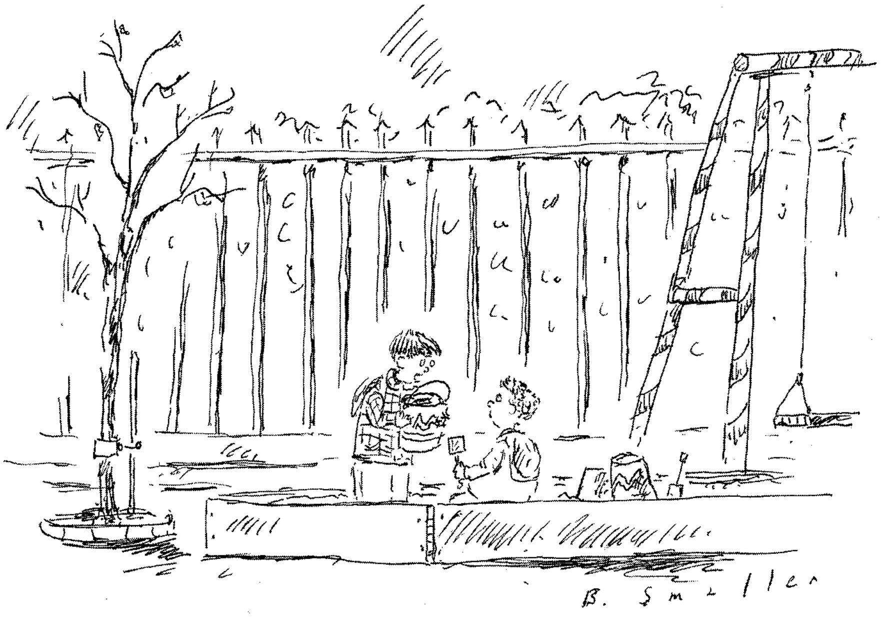
Sharif's confidant, Hassan Moallim Sheikh Ali, who was living in London at the time, said, "The Courts were naïve, and didn't realize how sinister Al Qaeda was. But I was aware of it. I warned them to watch out. Some of my friends said, 'Oh, you've changed. You're not the Hassan we knew,' but actually they were the ones who had changed. The radicalization in Somalia was taking place at a very amazing pace."

The Western official with long ties to Somalia told me that he believed Sharif had, indeed, been naïve about Al Qaeda. "I like him," he said. "But I have watched him vacillate over the years." Their first encounter was on New Year's Eve, 2004, in Mogadishu. After hearing a Courts radio broadcast to the effect that "anyone celebrating New Year's Eve should be executed," he had gone to ask Sharif about it. "He replied by saying, 'It's Christ's birthday, isn't it?' I put him right on the difference between Christmas and New Year's Eve, and he said, 'O.K., but it's not a Muslim holiday, is it? So Muslims shouldn't celebrate it.' He claimed ignorance of the call for execution I had heard. We discussed things like due process, and he backed off."

His impression back then was that Sharif "didn't seem to know much about how the world beyond Somalia worked. He was not even very knowledgeable about Mogadishu, and not fully in control of the Courts movement, either. It was clearly much larger than him," the official said. "He doesn't lead because he has a strong base; he leads at the pleasure of others, and along the way has surfed political trends from extremism and now all the way back to moderation."

I heard a more cynical view from a former Somali military officer in Nairobi. Sharif's conversion to moderation, he believed, had been more or less forced on him after the Ethiopian invasion, when he had fled to Kenya and the authorities took him into custody: "He had two choices, either to be stamped as a terrorist and taken to Guantánamo Bay or to coöperate."

A Somali adviser to President Sharif came to my room one morning and led me out onto the balcony. He pointed to the sea. A gray naval frigate was offshore, with what seemed



"It's all learning-is-fun and invented spelling, and then—bam!—second grade."

• •

to be a Black Hawk buzzing around it like a small black dragonfly. We could see the silhouettes of more ships on the horizon—ten in all. They had appeared at dawn. Sheikh Ali came in and asked if the ships were American. He said the President wanted to know.

Later, after the ships had gone, I saw a large explosion: the port was under rocket attack by the Shabaab. There was a fury of outgoing fire from Villa Somalia, followed by a burst of incoming fire. The President's guards watched the scene with binoculars. A few more rockets landed, but seemed to go wide, into the sea. By the time night fell, the firing had died down, except for the thump of mortar fire, as if set to some kind of timer, coming from the Presidential compound.

The next day, it was confirmed that the flotilla had been an American battle group, protecting cargo ships bringing supplies for AMISOM's forces. Somali press agencies reported that four people had been killed by Shabaab rockets. Another six people were said to have been killed by the government's retaliatory fire; it wasn't known whether they were civilians or fighters. "There's no way to know," one of Sharif's men said.

The Americans returned on September 14th, when U.S. Special Forces staged a helicopter raid in Shabaab-controlled territory south of Mogadishu, killing Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, an Al Qaeda operative from Kenya who was involved in a 2002 attack on an Israeli-owned hotel in Mombasa, and in the Nairobi and Dar es Salaam bombings. Afterward, a Shabaab spokesman vowed to take revenge.

"Politically, I am opposed to the Americans policing the world," Sharif's adviser remarked. "But I am personally very glad they are here now." He said that American spy planes flew on surveillance missions, mostly after dark—I had heard the drone of high-flying planes on several nights—and relayed the intelligence to AMISOM, though not directly to Sharif's government. This information had proved crucial when government positions were under the threat of attack. Sharif himself, the adviser said, had been reassured by the Americans that, if Villa Somalia was about to be overrun, they could evacuate him by air "within forty-five minutes."

Before leaving Mogadishu, I went to the airport with Major Barigye. Referring to the Shabaab, he said, "You ask yourself: Sheikh Sharif was the leader of these guys two years ago, and now they are against him. So what's changed? Has he changed? No. What's happened to make him an enemy? I'll tell you what's happened. He has shaken the hand of the infidel," Barigye said.

"You have a lost generation here," he went on. "Everyone between the age of ten and thirty-five has not known peace, and therefore they don't believe in it. So anyone who speaks the language of peace becomes their enemy. You can have a million tanks on the streets here, but you are not going to bring peace until the Somalis want it. The notion that this can be fixed quickly, and we can go away, is one we need to change. Allah may have said 'Let there be light,' and there was light, but that's not going to happen here in Somalia."

Just as in parts of Oklahoma and Texas tornadoes are an unhappy commonplace, in Somalia fighting comes in sudden flurries; anything short of heavy combat is a kind of peace, or, at least, an expected—if not welcome—part of life's routine. At breakfast one day, one of the President's men, Mukhtar, told me that he had learned the cause of a battle we'd heard the previous day. The fighting, on the road to the airport, hadn't been a Shabaab attack, as might have been assumed, but a battle between rival clans, both allied with the government.

"The thing is that you basically can't trust anyone yet," Mukhtar said. The risk of treachery extended inside Villa Somalia. He mentioned the name of a senior security official I had met, and whom I knew to be close to Sharif, and wrinkled his nose. "What we've got here is not ideal, but it's what we've got to work with, and hopefully we can balance them out until we get this thing on its feet."

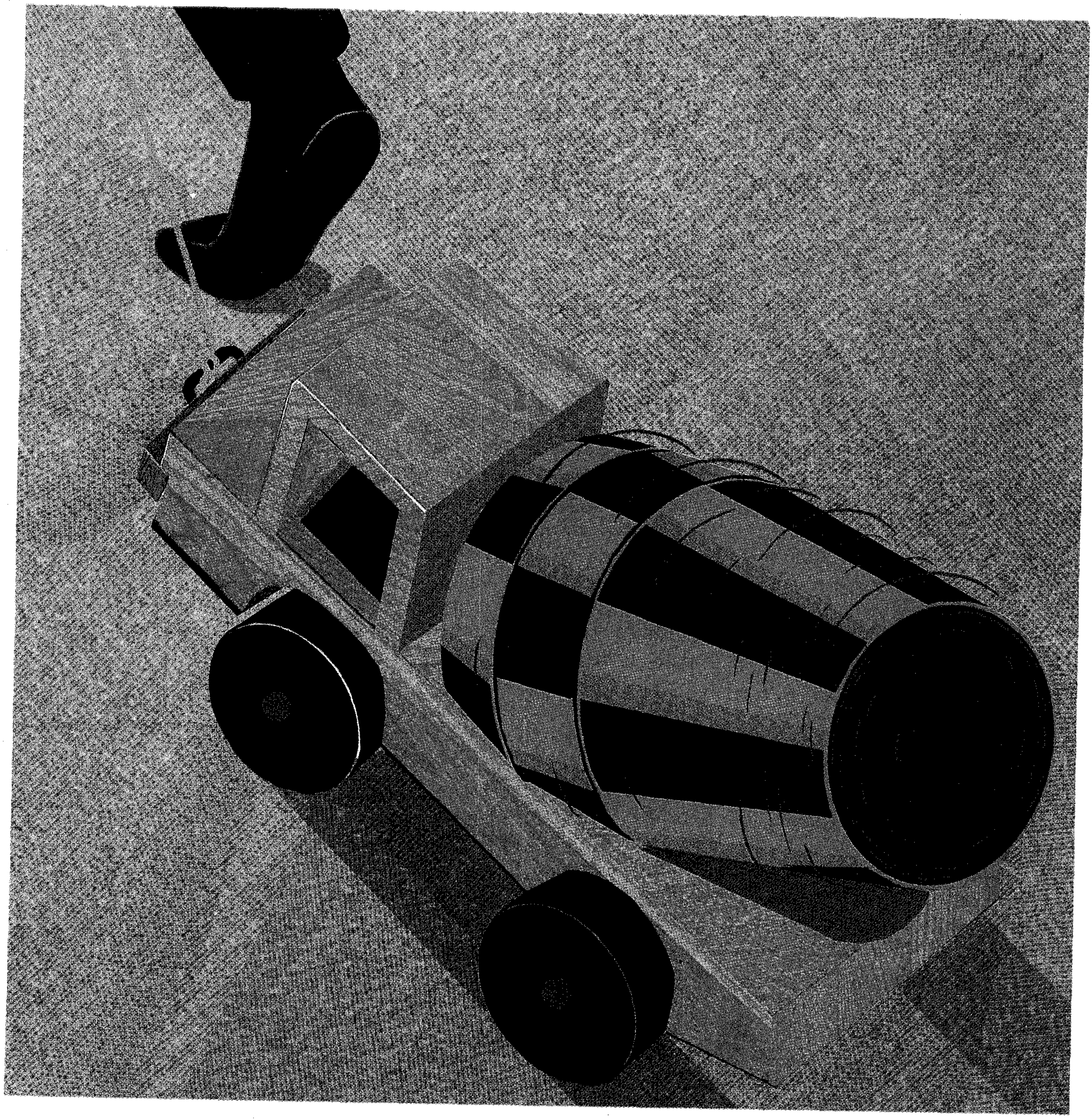
The former Somali military officer expressed a wary optimism. "Allah has finally come to our rescue. We've served as a Cold War proxy battleground, as a regional battleground, and we've been in a civil war. We appealed to everyone to help us, but no one came, and so finally we appealed to Allah. We asked him to give us oil, so as to interest the Americans, or else, we said, we need a couple of fighters from Afghanistan," he said.

"So now the Somalis have a weapon: we are a staging ground for the fight against global terrorism," he said. "After so many years, with our piracy and our jihad, we are finally able to project fear." ♦

FICTION

ALL THAT

BY DAVID FOSTER WALLACE



Once when I was a little boy I received as a gift a toy cement mixer. It was made of wood except for its wheels—axles—which, as I remember, were thin metal rods. I'm ninety per cent sure it was a Christmas gift. I liked it the same way a boy that age likes toy dump trucks, ambulances, tractor-trailers, and whatnot. There are little boys who like trains and little boys who like vehicles—I liked the latter.

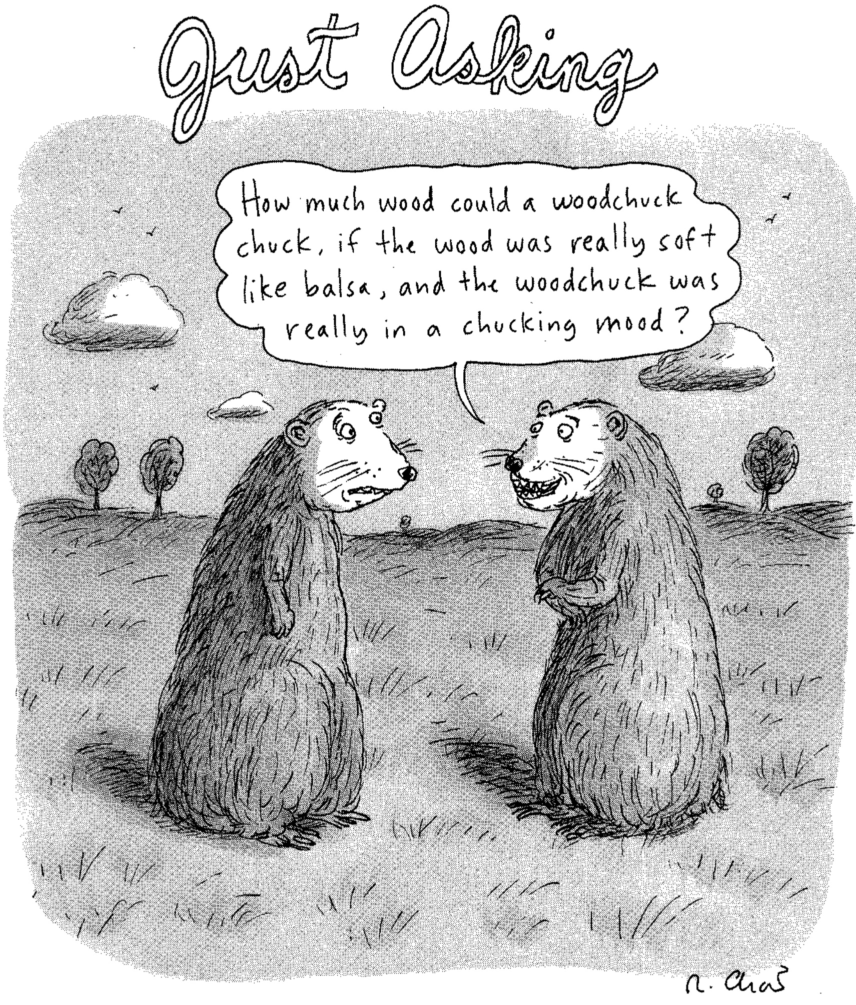
It was ("it" meaning the cement mixer) the same overlarge miniature as many other toy vehicles—about the size of a breadbox. It weighed three or four pounds. It was a simple toy—no batteries. It had a colored rope, with a yellow handle, and you held the handle and walked pulling the cement mixer behind you—rather like a wagon, although it was nowhere near the size of a wagon. For Christmas, I'm positive it was. It was when I was the age where you can, as they say, "hear voices" without worrying that something is wrong with you. I "heard voices" all the time as a small child. I was either five or six, I believe. (I'm not very good with numbers.)

I liked the cement mixer and played with it as much as or more than I played with the other toy vehicles I owned. At some point, several weeks or months after Christmas, however, my biological parents led me to believe that it was a magic and/or highly unusual cement mixer. Probably my mother told me this in a moment of adult boredom or whimsy, and then my father came home from work and joined in, also in a whimsical way. The magic—which my mother likely reported to me from her vantage on our living room's sofa, while watching me pull the cement mixer around the room by its rope, idly asking me if I was aware that it had magical properties, no doubt making sport of me in the bored half-cruel way that adults sometimes do with small children, playfully telling them things that they pass off to themselves as "tall tales" or "childlike inventions," unaware of the impact those tales may have (since magic is a serious reality for small children), though, conversely, if my parents believed that the cement mixer's magic was real, I do not understand why they waited weeks or months before telling me of it. They were a delightful but often impenetrable puzzle to me; I no more knew their minds and motives than a pencil knows what it is being used for. Now I have lost the thread. The "magic" was that, unbeknown to me, as I happily pulled the cement mixer behind me, the mixer's main cylinder or drum—the thing that, in a real cement mixer, mixes the cement; I do not know the actual word for it—rotated, went around and around on its horizontal axis, just as the drum on a real cement mixer does. It did this, my mother said, only when the mixer was being pulled by me and only, she stressed, when I wasn't looking. She insisted on this part, and my father later backed her up: the magic was not just that the drum of a solid wood object without batteries rotated but that it did so only when unobserved, stopping whenever observed. If, while pulling, I turned to look, my parents sombrely maintained, the drum magically ceased its rotation. How was this? I never, even for a moment, doubted what they'd told me. This is why it is that adults and even parents can, unwittingly, be cruel: they cannot imagine doubt's complete absence. They have forgotten.

The point was that months were henceforward spent by me trying to devise ways to catch the drum rotating. Evidence bore out what they had told me: turning my head obviously and unsubtly around always stopped the rotation of the drum. I also tried sudden whirls. I tried having someone else pull the cement mixer. I tried incremental turns of the head while pulling ("incremental" meaning turning my head at roughly the rate of a clock's minute hand). I tried peering through a keyhole as someone else pulled the cement mixer. Even turning my head at the rate of the hour hand. I never doubted—it didn't occur to me. The magic was that the mixer seemed always to know. I tried mirrors—first pulling the cement mixer straight toward a mirror, then through rooms that had mirrors at the periphery of my vision, then past mirrors hidden such that there was little chance that the cement mixer could even "know" that there was a mirror in the room. My strategies became very involved. I was in kindergarten and home half the day. The seriousness with which I tried must have caused my parents no little anguish of conscience. My father had not yet even received tenure; we were barely middle class, and lived in a rented house whose carpets were old and thin—the mixer made a noise as I pulled it. I begged my mother to take photographs as I pulled the mixer, staring with fraudulent intensity straight ahead. I placed a piece of masking tape on the drum and reasoned that if the tape appeared in one photo and not in the other this would provide proof of the drum's rotation. (Video cameras had not yet been invented.)

During Talk Time, before bed, my father sometimes told me stories of his own childhood adventures. He, an intellectual, had been, according to his stories, the sort of child who set traps for the Tooth Fairy (pyramids of tin cans at the door and windows of his room, string tied from his finger to the tooth below his pillow so that he would wake when the Fairy tried to take the tooth) and other "mythical" figures of childhood, such as Santa Claus. (Talk Time meant fifteen minutes of direct conversation—not stories or songs—with a parent as I lay tucked into bed. Four nights per week Talk Time was with my mother and three nights with my father. They were very organized about it.) I was, at this age, unfamiliar with Matthew 4:7, and my father, a devout atheist, was in no way alluding to Matthew 4:7 or using the tales of his fruitless childhood traps as parables or advice against my trying to "test" or "defeat" the magic of the cement mixer. In retrospect, I believe that my father was charmed by my attempts to "trap" the mixer's drum rotating because he saw them as evidence that I was a chip off the block of ad-hoc intellectual mania for empirical verification. In fact, nothing could have been farther from the truth. As an adult, I realize that the reason I spent so much time trying to "catch" the drum rotating was that I wanted to verify that I could not. If I had ever been successful in outsmarting the magic, I would have been crushed. I know this now. My father's tales of snares for the Easter Bunny or strings for the Tooth Fairy often made me feel sad, and when I cried over them sometimes my parents guiltily believed that I was crying over my frus-

YVETTA FEDOROVA


Just Asking
How much wood could a woodchuck chuck, if the wood was really soft like balsa, and the woodchuck was really in a chucking mood?
R. Chast

tration at not being able to catch sight of the rotating drum. I'm positive that this caused them anguish. In fact, I was crying with sadness, imagining how devastated my father would have felt as a child had he been successful in trapping the Tooth Fairy. I was not, at the time, aware that this was why the Talk Time stories made me sad. What I remember feeling was an incredible temptation to ask my father a question as he delightedly described these traps, and at the same time a huge and consuming but amorphous and nameless fear that prevented my asking the question. The conflict between the temptation and my inability to ask the question (owing to a fear of ever seeing pain on my father's pink, cheerful, placid face) caused me to weep with an intensity that must have caused my parents—who saw me as an eccentric and delicate child—no little guilt over their "cruel" invention of the cement mixer's magic. Under various pretexts, they bought me an exceptional number of toys and games in the months following that Christmas, trying to distract me from what they saw as a traumatic obsession with the toy cement mixer and its "magic."

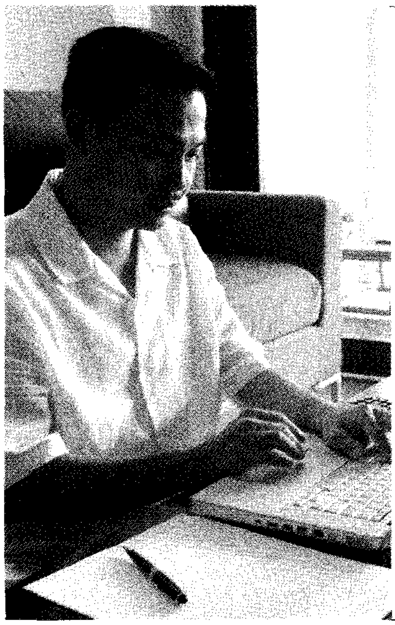
The toy cement mixer is the origin of the religious feeling that has informed most of my adult life. The question, which I (sadly) never did ask, was what my father proposed to do with the Tooth Fairy if he were ever successful in catching it. Possibly, though, another cause for the sadness was that I realized, on some level, that my parents, when they watched me trying to devise schemes for observing the drum's rotation, were wholly wrong about what they were seeing—that the world they saw and suffered over was wholly different from the childhood world in which I existed. I wept for them far more than any of the three of us knew at the time.

I, of course, never "caught" the drum of the cement mixer rotating. (The chassis and cab of the cement mixer were painted the intense orange of real public-works vehicles; the drum was painted in alternating stripes of the orange and a deep green, and I often envisioned the hypnotic swirl of the stripes as the drum rotated unobserved by me. I should have included this fact earlier, I realize.) I pulled the cement mixer around so much that my mother, after giving up on trying guiltily to distract me with other toys, banished me to the basement with the cement mixer so that its wheels would not wear further grooves in the living-room carpet. I never found a way to observe the drum's rotation without stopping that rotation. It never once occurred to me that my parents might have been putting me on. Nor did it ever bother me that the striped drum itself was glued or nailed to the orange chassis of the cement mixer and could not be rotated (or even budged) by hand. Such is the power of the word "magic." The same power accounts for why the "voices" I heard as a child never worried me or caused me to fear that something was wrong with me. And, in fact, the free rotation of an unpowered and securely fastened drum was not the "magic" that drove me. The magic was the way it knew to stop the instant I tried to see it. The magic was how it could not, not ever, be trapped or outsmarted. Though my obsession with the toy cement mixer had ended by the next Christmas, I have never forgotten it, or the feeling in my chest and midsection whenever yet another, even more involved attempt to trap the toy's magic met with failure—a mix of crushing disappointment and ecstatic reverence. This was the year, at five or six, that I learned the meaning of "reverence," which, as I understand it, is the natural attitude to take toward magical, unverifiable phenomena, the same way that "respect" and "obedience" describe the attitude one takes toward observable physical phenomena, such as gravity or money.

Among the qualities that made my parents see me as eccentric and mysterious was religion, for, without any prompting or even understanding, I was a religious child—meaning I was interested in religion and filled with feelings and concerns that we use the word “religious” to describe. (I’m not putting any of this well. I am not and never have been an intellectual. I am not articulate, and the subjects that I am trying to describe and discuss are beyond my abilities. I am trying, however, the best I can, and will go back over this as carefully as possible when I am finished, and will make changes and corrections whenever I can see a way to make what I’m discussing clearer or more interesting without fabricating anything.) My parents were intellectuals and devout atheists, but they were tolerant and largehearted, and when I began to ask “religious” questions and to express interest in “religious” themes they freely allowed me to seek out religiously oriented people with whom I could discuss these themes, and even to attend church services and Mass with the families of other children from school and our neighborhood who were religious. If you consider the usual meaning of “atheism,” which, as I understand it, is a kind of anti-religious religion, which worships reason, skepticism, intellect, empirical proof, human autonomy, and self-determination, my parents’ open tolerance of my religious interests and my regular attendance of services with the family next door (by this time my father had tenure, and we had our own home in a middle-class neighborhood with a highly rated school system) was exceptional—the sort of nonjudgmental, respectful attitude that religion itself (as I see it) tries to promulgate in its followers.

None of this occurred to me at the time; nor did the connection between my feelings for the “magic” toy cement mixer and, later, my interest in and reverence for the “magic” of religion become apparent to me until years later, when I was in the second year of seminary, during my first adult crisis of faith. The fact that the most powerful and significant connections in our lives are (at the time) invisible to us seems to me a compelling argument for religious reverence rather than skeptical empiricism as a response to life’s meaning. It is difficult to stay on what feels like the “track” of this discussion in an orderly, logical way. Some of the adults my parents allowed me to approach with religious questions and issues included teachers, a religion professor whom my father knew and respected from an interdepartmental university committee they had served on together, and the father and mother of the family next door, who were both deacons (a type of élite lay minister) in the church two blocks from our home. I will forgo a description of the issues, questions, and themes that my parents allowed me to discuss with these religious adults; they were entirely unexceptional and universal and average, the sorts of questions that everyone eventually confronts in his own time and his own individual way.

My surfeit of religious interest also had to do with the frequency and tenor of the “voices” I regularly heard as a child (meaning up until roughly age thirteen, as I recall it). The major reason that I was never frightened about the voices or worried about what “hearing voices” indicated about my possible mental health involved the fact that the childhood “voices” (there were two of them, each distinct in timbre and personality) never spoke of anything that wasn’t good, happy, and reassuring. I will mention these voices only in passing, because they are both not directly vital to this and also very hard to describe or convey adequately to anyone else. I should emphasize that, although “make-believe” and “invisible friends” are customary parts of childhood, these voices were—or appeared to me as—entirely real and autonomous phenomena, unlike the voices of any “real” adults in my experience, and with manners of speech and accent that nothing in my childhood experience had exposed me to or prepared me in any way to “make up” or combine from outside sources. (I realized just now that another reason that I do not propose to discuss these childhood “voices” at length is that I tend to fall into attempts to argue that the voices were “real,” when in fact it is a matter of indifference to me whether they were truly “real” or not or whether any other person can be forced to admit



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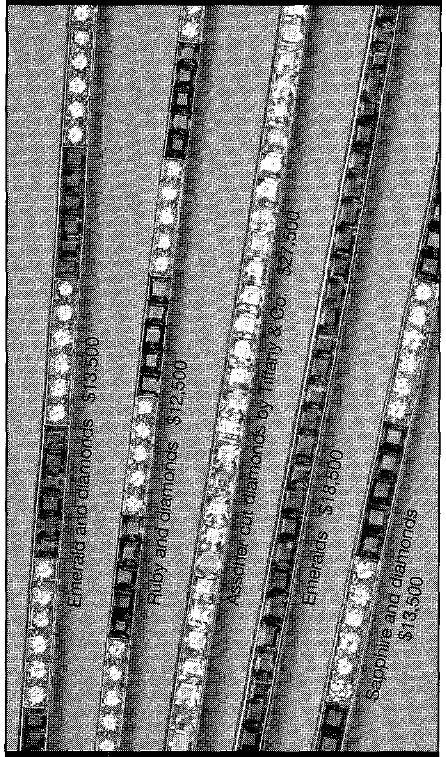
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Lippincott takes a photograph with his eye.
Wittmann paints in the crust of salt with a finger of spit.
Yoshioka wheels the last piano onto the fire.
Owens throws stones at a rock.
The afternoon turns over in its sleep, then sleeps.

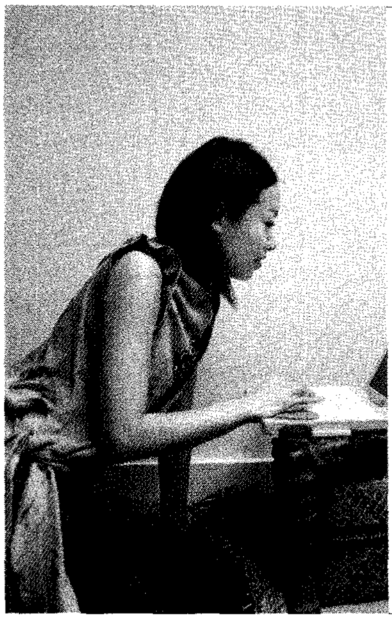
Kirszenstein trades her kingfisher skull for a tinned peach.
Jerome traps air in a screw-top jar.
Bambuck plants the last of his teeth.
Johnson dresses his gangrenous wound with a carrier bag.
Bolt pulls up the ladder, secures the hatch.

—*Simon Armitage*

that they were not "hallucinations" or "fantasies." Indeed, one of the voices' favorite topics consisted in their assuring me that it was of no importance whether I believed they were "real" or simply parts of myself, since—as one of the voices in particular liked to stress—there was nothing in the whole world as "real" as I was. I should concede that in some ways I regarded—or "counted on"—the voices as another set of parents (meaning, I think, that I loved them and trusted them and yet respected or "revered" them: in short, I was not their equal), and yet also as fellow-children: meaning that I had no doubt that they and I lived in the very same world and that they "understood" me in a way that biological adults were incapable of.) (Probably one reason that I fall automatically into the urge to "argue for" the voices' "reality" is that my "real" parents, though they were wholly tolerant of my believing in the voices, obviously viewed them as the same sort of "invisible friend" fantasies I mentioned above.)

At any rate, the best analogy for the experience of hearing these childhood "voices" of mine is that it was like going around with your own private masseur, who spent all his time giving you back—and shoulder—rubs (which my biological mother also used to do whenever I was sick in bed, using rubbing alcohol and baby powder and also changing the pillowcases, so that they were clean and cool; the experience of the voices was analogous to the feeling of turning a pillow over to the cool side). Sometimes the experience of the voices was ecstatic, sometimes so much so that it was almost too intense for me—as when you first bite into an apple or a confection that tastes so delicious and causes such a flood of oral juices that there is a moment of intense pain in your mouth and glands—particularly in the late afternoons of spring and summer, when the sunlight on sunny days achieved moments of immanence and became the color of beaten gold and was itself (the light, as if it were taste) so delicious that it was almost too much to stand, and I would lie on the pile of large pillows in our living room and roll back and forth in an agony of delight and tell my mother, who always read on the couch, that I felt so good and full and ecstatic that I could hardly bear it, and I remember her pursing her lips, trying not to laugh, and saying in the driest possible voice that she found it hard to feel too much sympathy or concern for this problem and was confident that I could survive this level of ecstasy, and that I probably didn't need to be rushed to the emergency room, and at such moments my love and affection for my mother's dry humor and love became, stacked atop the original ecstasy, so intense that I almost had to stifle a scream of pleasure as I rolled ecstatically between the pillows and the books on the floor. I do not have any real idea what my mother—an exceptional, truly lovable woman—made of having a child who sometimes suffered actual fits of ecstasy; and I do not know whether she herself had them. Nevertheless, the experience of the real but unobservable and unexplainable "voices" and the ecstatic feelings they often aroused doubtless contributed to my reverence for magic and my faith that magic not only permeated the everyday world but did so in a way that was thoroughly benign and altruistic and wished me well. I was never the sort of child who believed in "monsters under the bed" or vampires, or who needed a night-light in his bedroom; on the contrary, my father (who clearly "enjoyed" me and my eccentricities) once laughingly told my mother that he thought I might suffer from a type of benign psychosis called "anti-paranoia," in which I seemed to believe that I was the object of an intricate universal conspiracy to make me so happy I could hardly stand it.

The specific instance traceable as the origin of my religious impulse after my interest in the cement mixer passed (to my parents' great relief) involved a nineteen-fifties war movie that my father and I watched together on television one Sunday afternoon with the curtains drawn to prevent the sunlight from making it hard to see the screen of our black-and-white television. Watching television together was one of my father's and my favorite and most frequent activities (my mother disliked television), and usually took place on the couch, with my father, who read during the commercials, sitting at one end and me lying down, with my head on a pillow on my father's knees. (One of my strongest sensory memories of childhood is the feel of my father's knees against my head and the joking way he sometimes rested his book on my head when the commercial interruption occurred.) The movie in question's subject was the First World War and it starred an actor who was much lauded for his roles in war movies. At this point my memory diverges sharply from my father's, as evidenced by a disturbing conversation we had during my second year at seminary. My father apparently remembers that the film's hero, a beloved lieutenant, dies when he throws himself on an enemy grenade that has been lobbed into his platoon's trench ("platoon" meaning a small military grouping of infantrymen with close ties from being constant comrades in arms). According to my father, a platoon is usually commanded by a lieutenant. Whereas I remember clearly that the hero, played by an actor who was noted for his portrayal of conflict and trauma, suffers private anguish over the moral question of killing in combat and the whole religious conundrum of a "just war" and "justified killing," and finally undergoes a total psychological breakdown when his own comrade successfully lobs a grenade into a crowded enemy trench and leaps screaming (the hero does, fairly early in the film) into the enemy's trench and falls on the grenade and dies saving the enemy platoon, and that much of the rest of the film (albeit constantly interrupted by commercials when I saw it) depicts the hero's platoon struggling to interpret the action of their formerly beloved lieutenant, with many of them bitterly denouncing him as a traitor, many others holding that battle fatigue and a traumatic letter from "Stateside" received earlier in the film exculpated his act as a kind of temporary insanity, and only one shy, idealistic recruit (played by an actor I have never seen in another movie of that era) secretly believing that the lieutenant's act of dying for the enemy was actually heroic and deserved to be recorded and dramatized for posterity (the shy, anonymous recruit is the narrator, in "voice-overs" at the film's beginning and end), and I never forgot the movie (whose title both my father and I missed because we didn't turn on the television until after the movie had begun, which is not the same as "forgetting" the title, which my father jokingly claims is what we both did) or the impact of the lieutenant's act, which I, too (like the shy, idealistic narrator), regarded as not only "heroic" but also beautiful in a way that was almost too intense to bear, especially as I lay across my father's knees. ♦



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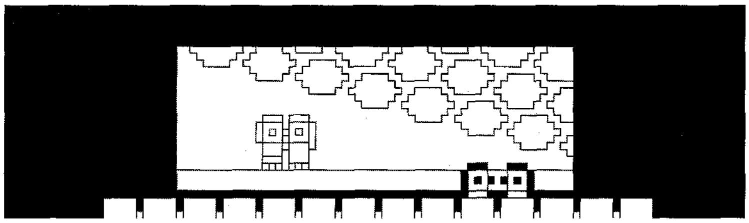

THE THEATRE

DANGEROUS LIAISONS

Tennessee Williams and David Mamet on the damage that we do.

BY JOHN LAHR

When we first encounter Cate Blanchett as Blanche DuBois in the Sydney Theatre Company's thrilling production of Tennessee Williams's "A Streetcar Named Desire" (directed by Liv Ullmann, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music), she is literally backed into a corner, sitting on her small valise at the shadowy edge of the stage. As the Ink Spots' "If I Didn't Care" plays, Blanche takes a short, almost imperceptible breath, then sets off, in a white suit and a floppy white sun hat, for 632 Elysian Fields, where her younger sister, Stella Kowalski (the excellent Robin McLeavy), lives with her husband, Stanley (Joel Edgerton). Blanche's eyes flutter, and the valise shifts in her hand, almost too heavy for her taut, bony frame to carry. Even before we know her story, her nervy bearing tells us something about her history of abdication. As the play unfolds, the extent of her losses becomes clear: she has lost her husband, her family home, her job, her good name, her purity, and, ultimately, her sanity. This will be her last stand.

Blanche is the Everest of modern American drama, a peak of psychological complexity and emotional range, which many stars have attempted and few have conquered. Of the performances I've seen in recent years, Jessica Lange's lacked theatrical amperage, Natasha Richardson's was too buff, and Rachel Weisz's, in this year's overpraised Donmar Warehouse production in London, was too callow. The challenge for the actress taking on Blanche lies in fathoming her spiritual exhaustion, her paradoxical combination of backbone and collapse. Blanche has worn herself out, bearing her burden of guilt and grief, and facing down the world with a masquerade of Southern gaiety and grace. She is looking—as Williams himself was when he wrote the play—for "a cleft in the rock of the world that I could hide in."

Blanchett, with her alert mind, her informed heart, and her lithe, patrician silhouette, gets it right from the first beat. "I've got to keep hold of myself," Blanche says, her spirits sinking with disappointment at the threadbare squalor of the one-room apartment her sister shares with her working-class husband. "Only Poe! Only Mr. Edgar Allan Poe!—could do it justice! Out here I suppose is the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir!" she drawls to Stella, flapping her long birdlike fingers in the direction of the window and the railroad tracks beyond. Blanchett doesn't make the usual mistake of foreshadowing Blanche's end at the play's beginning; she allows Blanche a slow, fascinating decline. And she is compelling both as a brazen flirt and as an amusing bitch. When Stella explains that Stanley is Polish, for instance, Blanche replies, "They're something like the Irish, aren't they? Only not so—highbrow." It's part of Blanchett's great accomplishment that she makes Blanche's self-loathing as transparent and dramatic as her self-regard. She hits every rueful note of humor and regret in Williams's dialogue. In one desperate scene, in which Blanche explains her sordid past to Stanley's friend Mitch (Tim Richards), who has been disabused of his romantic interest in her, she takes a slug of Southern Comfort. "Southern Comfort!" she exclaims. "What is that, I wonder?" Dishevelled, sitting on the floor by the front door, she fesses up to Mitch. "Yes, I had many intimacies with strangers," she says, in a voice fatigued by heartbreak. I don't expect to see a better performance of this role in my lifetime.

I will, however, see a better set. Although Ullmann gives the production many masterly touches—there is no Big Easy folderol here and almost no allegorical flimflammery—she has allowed Ralph Myers to lumber his set with an ungainly fire escape, which cramps the left side of the stage and inhibits important scenes played there, and with a sort of lumpish second story of mostly black cinder block. The set has not a whiff of lyrical New Orleans about it; the play might as well be taking place in downtown Cleveland. The bathroom where Blanche takes the long, luxurious soaks that so enrage Stanley is a makeshift construction inside the main room. All the couple's arguments about Blanche and her parlous situation happen no more than a yard away from where she's making her ablutions; it takes a powerful suspension of disbelief to imagine that she can't hear everything that's being said. The design's one substantial asset is the way it maximizes the sense of claustrophobia, turning the apartment into a little cave of carnality.

The cunning and dynamic Stanley is the phallic force at the center of Williams's tragedy. Edgerton, with his particular low-key roughness, is superb in the role, and although he doesn't have Marlon Brando's sexual charisma—who could?—he manages the rare feat of shedding that iconic shadow. Edgerton is not a big man or an especially brawny one. He has small, watchful eyes. His face belies a brusque and wary nature that veers between cruelty and sentimentality. In one memorable scene, when Stella asks Stanley to clear his plate after the fiasco of Blanche's birthday party, Edgerton's Stanley spits food in her face; in another, he sits, sopping wet, on the edge of the tub that his poker-playing buddies tossed him into, in poignant drunken remorse over having punched his pregnant wife in the face.

Ullmann's direction delivers so much

Southern belle: Cate Blanchett is pitch perfect as Blanche DuBois in "A Streetcar Named Desire." Photograph by Brigitte Lacombe.

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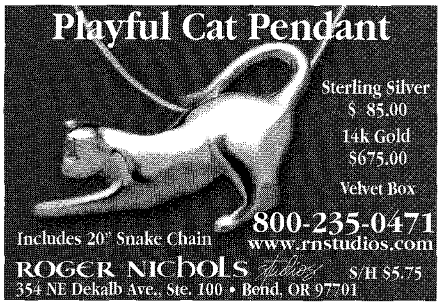
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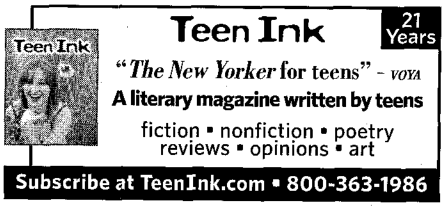
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pleasure that it's a shame that, at the finale, she doesn't deliver the play's meaning. In her staging of the rape scene that drives Blanche over the edge, Blanche collapses on the bed, only to have her degradation prettified by an invented postcoital dumb show. When, some weeks later, the demented Blanche is taken to a sanitarium, she doesn't, contrary to Williams's stage directions, get herself up in the regalia of normalcy, a performance of dignity that, in other stagings, gives genuine pathos to her exit. Instead, still in her slip and bare feet, clutching the doctor with both hands, Blanche is led into the bright light of day like a loony Daisy Mae from "Li'l Abner" 's Dogpatch. Ullmann's reductive decisions build to vulgar sentimentality, with Blanche isolated in a spotlight and lost in her own internal music as the curtain falls. Although this doesn't spoil the evening, it's a woeful miscalculation. Williams's play ends not with Blanche but with the Kowalskis' sexual reconciliation. The final image—unseen on Ullmann's stage—has, in a sort of Renaissance pictorial grouping, Stella holding her baby, while Stanley kneels at her feet. She sobs as he undoes the buttons of her blouse and murmurs, "Now, now, love." Blanche has been sacrificed to the Kowalskis' desire and collusion. The play ends with a line never heard in this production. "This game is seven-card stud," one of Stanley's poker-playing buddies says, dealing a new hand. The game of life, Williams is telling us, goes on at all costs.

Ruthlessness of a rhetorical kind is part of the fun of David Mamet's "Race" (directed by the author, at the Ethel Barrymore), his latest exercise in contrarian provocation. "Do you know what you can say? To a black man. On the subject of race?" Henry Brown (David Alan Grier), a black lawyer, says to Charles Strickland (Richard Thomas), a rich, white potential client who is accused of raping a black woman. "Nothing," Charles says. "That is correct," Henry replies. Henry's firm has three lawyers—two of them black—which is the reason that Charles has sought them out. "We have *won*. By being *quick* and being *brutal*. Being fast and first, and tearing off the fucking Band-Aid," the hard-bitten white partner, Jack Lawson (the expert James Spader), explains to Charles.

The lawyers' rebarbative style happens also to be Mamet's. He doesn't waste the audience's time; his exhilarating epigrammatic style broadcasts the will to prevail. Having declared recently, in a piece he wrote for the *Times*, that debates about race are, for the most part, "nothing but sanctimony," Mamet offers instead nothing but cynicism. In this, he is an equal-opportunity employer. "I don't think we're brothers beneath the skin, over the skin, or in any way *associated* with the skin," Henry says to Charles. From the packed multiracial audience attending on the night I saw the show, the line got applause.

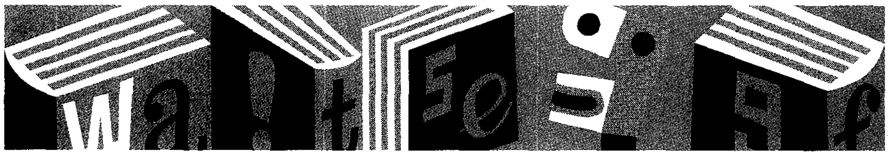
To Mamet, self-interest is the bedrock of all human behavior. When Susan (Kerry Washington), Jack's fetching new hire, who is getting some Socratic on-the-job training, accuses him of exploitation for investigating her past before hiring her, Jack says, "You tell me that equally, you might not exploit being black? Or that any human being whatever might not, when pressed, exploit whatever momentary advantage he or she possessed. Tell me that, and I'll go give my life to Christ." Henry, as he debriefs Charles, gives the notion of selfishness another angle: "Do all black people hate whites? Let me put your mind at rest. You *bet* we do. White folks are 'scared'? All to the good. . . . We're thrilled you're *guilty*."

Is Charles guilty? Will Jack's ingenious defense, revolving around the sequins on the black woman's dress, work? The plot, such as it is, demonstrates the contention of Mamet's *Times* piece, that "just as personal advantage was derived by whites from the defense of slavery and its continuation as Jim Crow and segregation, so too personal advantage, political advantage and indeed expression of deeply held belief may lead nonwhites to defense of positions that . . . will eventually be revealed as untenable." In reality, Mamet would be hard pressed to defend his weasel words; onstage, where his story turns on racial profiling by blacks, he can make it seem plausible, if not persuasive.

Mamet seems to insist on an unbridgeable divide between black and white America. His play acknowledges the hatred but not the source of the division; it doesn't tell us, to quote James Baldwin, in "The White Man's Guilt," "who established this distance, who is this distance designed to protect, and from what is this distance designed to offer protection." ♦

A YEAR'S READING

Reviewers' favorites from 2009.



LASSE SKARBÖVIK

NONFICTION

Lords of Finance, *by Liaquat Ahamed (Penguin Press; $32.95).* Central bankers and the disaster of the gold standard.

Somewhere Towards the End, *by Diana Athill (Norton; $24.95).* Reflections on life as a nonagenarian.

Why the Dreyfus Affair Matters, *by Louis Begley (Yale; $24).* A compact treatment of a complex case.

Germany 1945, *by Richard Bessel (Harper; $28.99).* A powerful picture of a nation in defeat.

Hiding Man, *by Tracy Daugherty (St. Martin's; $35).* The life and work of Donald Barthelme.

Zeitoun, *by Dave Eggers (McSweeney's; $24).* Caught between Hurricane Katrina and the war on terror.

My Paper Chase, *by Harold Evans (Little, Brown; $27.99).* Memories of the newspaper trade.

Eating Animals, *by Jonathan Safran Foer (Little, Brown; $25.99).* A playful yet serious vegetarian manifesto.

Flannery, *by Brad Gooch (Little, Brown; $30).* The quiet life behind Flannery O'Connor's fantastic fiction.

Dorothea Lange, *by Linda Gordon (Norton; $35).* From society photographer to photographer of society.

Fordlandia, *by Greg Grandin (Metropolitan; $27.50).* Henry Ford's Amazonian folly.

Go Down Together, *by Jeff Guinn (Simon & Schuster; $27).* Behind the myth of Bonnie and Clyde.

Beg, Borrow, Steal, *by Michael Greenberg (Other Press; $19.95).* Notes on a freelancing life.

A Strange Eventful History, *by Michael Holroyd (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $40).* The linked lives of two nineteenth-century stage stars.

Marx's General, *by Tristram Hunt (Metropolitan; $32).* Friedrich Engels, the industrialist who bankrolled "Das Kapital."

Lit, *by Mary Karr (Harper; $25.99).* The author of "The Liars' Club" finds God.

The Magician's Book, *by Laura Miller (Little, Brown; $25.99).* Reading C. S. Lewis as a child and as an adult.

Trotsky, *by Robert Service (Harvard; $35).* Stalin's rival is not to be romanticized.

A Paradise Built in Hell, *by Rebecca Solnit (Viking; $27.95).* Natural disasters and the power of community.

The First Tycoon, *by T. J. Stiles (Knopf; $37.50).* Cornelius Vanderbilt's grand gambles.

The Death of Conservatism, *by Sam Tanenhaus (Random House; $17).* A movement's maladies.

The Yankee Years, *by Joe Torre and Tom Verducci (Doubleday; $26.95).* A view from the bench.

The Parents We Mean to Be, *by Richard Weissbourd (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; $25).* Why we should beware of overpraising our children.

The Evolution of God, *by Robert Wright (Little, Brown; $25.99).* The development of religion from the Stone Age to now.

FICTION AND POETRY

The Year of the Flood, *by Margaret Atwood (Nan A. Talese / Doubleday; $26.95).* Revisiting the post-apocalyptic world of "Oryx and Crake."

The Anthologist, *by Nicholson Baker (Simon & Schuster; $25).* A crafty bagatelle on poetic themes.

The Way Through Doors, *by Jesse Ball (Vintage; $13.95).* A dizzyingly circuitous inversion of the Scheherazade legend.

The Collected Poems & Unfinished Poems, *by C. P. Cavafy, translated from the Greek by Daniel Mendelsohn (Knopf; $35 & $30).* Modern Greek's great master.

The Immortals, *by Amit Chaudhuri (Knopf; $25.95).* Tradition and modernity in Bombay.

The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis *(Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $30).* Small but perfectly formed fictions.

Sonata Mulattica, *by Rita Dove (Norton; $24.95).* A verse sequence about a biracial violinist who played with Beethoven.

Jeff in Venice, Death in Varanasi, *by Geoff Dyer (Pantheon; $24).* A diptych of cosmopolitan emptiness and spiritual seeking.

Every Man Dies Alone, *by Hans Fallada, translated from the German by Michael Hofmann (Melville House; $27).* A neglected classic about a couple's resistance to the Nazis.

Wanting, *by Richard Flanagan (Atlantic Monthly; $24).* From Tasmania to the Arctic with Sir John Franklin.

Dark Places, *by Gillian Flynn (Shaye Areheart; $24).* A sinister thriller about a girl who survives her family's murder.

The Magicians, *by Lev Grossman (Viking; $26.95).* An artfully self-reflective fantasy novel.

Tinkers, *by Paul Harding (Bellevue Literary Press; $14.95).* The death of a patriarch in nineteenth-century Maine.

The Believers, *by Zoë Heller (Harper; $25.99).* Family secrets and rivalries in the aftermath of 9/11.

Censoring an Iranian Love Story, *by Shahriar Mandanipour, translated from the Farsi by Sara Khalili (Knopf; $25).* Passion and repression in the Islamic Republic.

The Vagrants, *by Yiyun Li (Random House; $25).* A novel of political upheaval in China.

Wolf Hall, *by Hilary Mantel (Henry Holt; $27).* Tudor intrigue.

Upgraded to Serious, *by Heather McHugh (Copper Canyon; $22).* Poems of compassion and verbal intricacy.

Her Fearful Symmetry, *by Audrey Niffenegger (Scribner; $26.99).* A gothic yarn around a London cemetery.

Brooklyn, *by Colm Tóibín (Scribner; $25).* Emigration, love, and homesickness.

Love and Summer, *by William Trevor (Viking; $25.95).* Irish provincial life in the nineteen-fifties.

Lowboy, *by John Wray (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $25).* A schizophrenic rides the subway.

BOOKS

THE ENTERTAINER

Louis Armstrong's underrated legacy.

BY JOHN McWHORTER

Armstrong in New York City in 1966. Photograph by Philippe Halsman.

In 1968, the jazz critic Gary Giddins, then an undergraduate at Grinnell College, in Iowa, invited Louis Armstrong to play on campus. The school resisted Giddins's proposal to give Armstrong an honorary degree, and Giddins had to hide from his guest that some students were picketing because they would rather hear a rock group. Armstrong had only three years to live, and was travelling with a doctor. Giddins later recalled his shock at meeting "an old man in a loose tuxedo, his brown coloring tinctured with gray, his eyes slightly rheumy." Giddins noted the slack handshake and wondered, "Why does he still bother?" But then Satchmo took the stage:

> As Armstrong emerged into the light, arms slightly raised, palms out, he appeared transfigured. The ashen color was gone, the eyes blazed, the smile blinded. When he sang, he engaged the crowd eyeball to eyeball. When he blew trumpet, he kept his eyes open, but the pupils rolled upward as though he were no longer in the room. His huge tone was as golden and unspotted as ever.

People who saw Armstrong perform in the latter half of his life often found their expectations exceeded. David Halberstam went to see him expecting "to write a twilight-of-career piece" but came away impressed—"the essence of the trumpet is all there, still able to touch a man in almost any mood."

While everyone acknowledges Armstrong's mastery, his importance often falls from view. Perhaps that's because there are, in effect, two Armstrongs—the genial man croaking "Hello, Dolly" on television, and the meteoric trumpeter of the twenties, a performer with a strong claim to be the founder of jazz as we know it. Terry Teachout confronts this dichotomy in a new biography of Armstrong, "Pops" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; $30). Although Laurence Bergreen's life (1997) has more biographical detail, and biographies by James Lincoln Collier (1983) and Gary Giddins (1988) scrutinize the music more closely, Teachout excels at conveying the interplay between Armstrong the artist and Armstrong the entertainer, and at examining the particular challenge of his legacy. Armstrong survived into an era when his musical style seemed old-fashioned and his stage persona uncomfortably reminiscent of minstrelsy. A tragic by-product of his vaudevillian roots was that a man uniquely at ease with himself came to be dismissed by his own people as a fake.

Armstrong grew up poor in a black district of New Orleans, the son of an absent father and a mother who occasionally resorted to prostitution. He always insisted, patriotically, that he'd been born on the Fourth of July, 1900, but baptismal records reveal that he was born on the less resonant date of August 4, 1901. His birthday was never celebrated when he was a child, and his mother, recalling fireworks the night he was born, misremembered the date.

At the age of eleven, after firing a pistol at a New Year's celebration, he was hauled off to a local reform school, the Colored Waif's Home for Boys. The school happened to have a brass band, in which Armstrong was able to burnish cornet skills that he had picked up along the way. It was at the Colored Waif's Home for Boys that Armstrong became a musician, and, on his release, a year and a half later, he was reluctant to leave. He began doing menial jobs while playing at clubs by night, and, over the next years, became a local phenomenon. In 1922, he was summoned to Chicago by his idol and mentor, the Louisiana-born trumpeter Joe (King) Oliver, who had formed a new band. Because Oliver made recordings, it is here, in 1923, that we first hear Armstrong play.

On the Oliver 78s, the first real sample of black jazz on record, Armstrong's cornet solos jump out as something quite unprecedented. Even playing a slide whistle in a half chorus of "Sobbin' Blues," he demonstrates a sense of time—the attack an exquisite shade

MAGNUM PHOTOS

ahead of the beat—that, at this date, was utterly individual. Before long, Armstrong moved to New York, where he gained wider exposure, playing in Fletcher Henderson's band and contributing memorably to sides by vocalists like Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith. In "You've Been a Good Ole Wagon," as Smith taunts her ex, praising the talents of her new lover, Armstrong almost upstages her with interjections on his muted cornet, mimicking the discarded fellow with sobbing, growling, and stuttering effects that resolve into supple arpeggios. In 1925, Okeh, a "race record" label, brought Armstrong back to Chicago to record with his own groups, the Hot Five and the Hot Seven.

Teachout notes how difficult it is today to appreciate the value of the Oliver sides, given their dim, crackly sonics. The same problem applies to the Hot Five recordings, especially the earlier ones. It doesn't help that by modern standards not all of the Five were virtuosos. The trombonist Kid Ory's intonation could be approximate, and writers compete for ways to disparage Lil Hardin's herky-jerky piano solos; James Lincoln Collier said that she sounded "like someone elbowing his way through a crowd." Yet these 78s were as crucial in creating our modern musical sensibility as D. W. Griffith's films were in creating the grammar of cinematic narrative. To get a sense of how revolutionary the Hot Five were, it helps to sample earlier jazz recordings by groups like the Original Dixieland Jazz Band or Isham Jones's band, in which everyone tends to play at once against a beat that is peppy but inflexible and a tad frantic, affording little room for anything as idiosyncratic as soul. By contrast, in the Hot Five's recordings, solo improvisations took pride of place. In "Cornet Chop Suey," there is Armstrong's extended segment of freestyle improvisational comments over a stop-time beat; his endlessly celebrated solo on "Big Butter and Egg Man" is a liberated gloss on the banal melody, effortlessly jaunty and propulsive. For those who aren't jazz buffs, Armstrong's significance can be elusive: these transformative solos last mere fractions of a minute. But early records, lasting around three minutes a side, capture only a sliver of what his actual nightly work was. On a nineteen-twenties recording of "Shanghai Shuffle," with the Fletcher Henderson band, Armstrong does a quick solo, but when performing it live he would wow the house with a mounting series of choruses. At Harlem's Savoy Ballroom, people hearing Armstrong's solos on "West End Blues" actually screamed.

Armstrong gave America a new rhythm, bouncing early jazz into the lighter, subtler magic of swing. The general standard of trumpet technique was elevated in his wake, and he extended the range of jazz singing as well, refracting song with the nonsense syllabicity of scatting. Blacks had heard some unrecorded scatting before, but Armstrong was the first to set it in shellac—on "Heebie Jeebies"—and soon Ethel Waters, Ella Fitzgerald, and even Bing Crosby followed.

For all this, in critics' discussion of Armstrong's music after the twenties—that is, most of his life's work—there is an unmistakable tone of apologia. The fact is that, while performers around him assimilated his innovations, he never really grew. There is no "late" Armstrong, in the manner of the extended and harmonically dense suites that Duke Ellington, two years older, produced from the fifties onward. Nor did Armstrong have any interest in bebop, unlike his contemporary and sometime collaborator the saxophonist Coleman Hawkins. For the final four decades of his life, Armstrong just kept on blowing his horn. He led bands of variable quality, playing in a style that Teachout charitably calls "less unabashedly virtuosic." This was partly the result of a lip so damaged that it occasionally bled down his shirtfront after gigs. Armstrong, like many self-taught geniuses, had a faulty technique, and, by the forties, the scar tissue—alarmingly visible in a closeup shot at the end of the 1956 film "High Society"—was such that rapid-fire cascades of notes no longer came as easily.

Armstrong embodied a peculiar disjunction: he was a trailblazer but not an experimenter. He entered the jazz scene so early, and his gift was so natural, that it barely seems to have occurred to him that what he was doing was art. Jazz, in its

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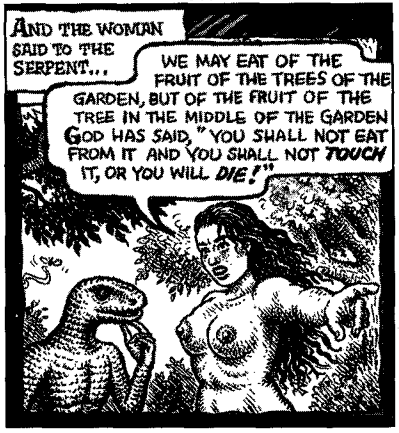
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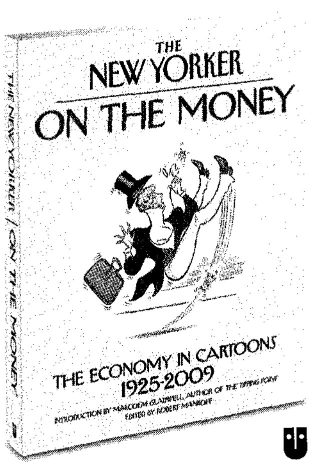
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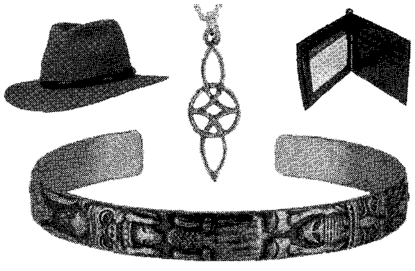

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early years, did not have the status that it was to acquire by mid-century, when America's ascendancy occasioned a self-conscious attempt, on the part of artists from Jackson Pollock to Jerome Robbins, to devise quintessentially American styles. Add to this Armstrong's gift for singing and his taste for clowning between sets, and it is easy to understand that he thought of his trumpet-playing as just one of the ways he could give his audiences pleasure.

For some critics, this eagerness to please is hard to forgive. Collier, in his biography, decried "the bitter waste of his astonishing talent." But what jazz buffs value in Armstrong, who rarely even referred to his music as jazz, differs from how he saw himself. Teachout—who, in a list of thirty "key" recordings, includes twenty that came after the Hot Five and Seven—takes a more reasonable line, arguing that Armstrong could not have had such influence in American music had he not been "a soloist of genius with a personality to match, a charismatic individual capable of meeting the untutored listener halfway."

Besides, artistic excellence is measured not only in originality but also in chops. Even his work on the "High Society" soundtrack, with gorgeous decorations elevating the second-drawer songs from the tail end of Cole Porter's career, was far beyond what any trumpeter before Armstrong could have pulled off. Playing as many as three hundred gigs a year, he hit high C dozens of times a night—and sometimes even a high F—while still spinning out articulate improvisations. There can be mastery in stasis. As the French jazz critic Hugues Panassié said, "Before, his career was a matter of seeking and finding. Now he *knows*."

From the late forties until the end of his life, Armstrong travelled with a sextet of ever-changing membership known as the All Stars, resting periodically with his fourth wife, Lucille, in their house in Corona, Queens. As time went by, Armstrong became known less for his improvisational virtuosity than for his onstage shtick: the toothy smile, the head-waggling, and the bug eyes; the sweat-wiping, the corny jokes ("My makeup's coming off!"), and the genial kowtowing. Armstrong had learned to hold a stage in the nineteen-teens and twenties, an era when black entertainers who wanted to make a living had to swallow their indignation at white privilege. But younger performers came to see his antics as offensive. To Dizzy Gillespie, Armstrong was a "plantation character"; Miles Davis, who admired Armstrong's musicianship, regretted that "his personality was developed by white people wanting black people to entertain by smiling and jumping around."

But to view Armstrong as an Uncle Tom, as many did and still do, is to ignore the extent of his anger about the injustices of segregation and of his willingness to speak out. A notable instance occurred in 1957, in the wake of Brown v. Board of Education, when Orval Faubus, the governor of Arkansas, resisted the desegregation of a high school in Little Rock. Talking to a reporter, Armstrong called Faubus a "no-good motherfucker" (sanitized for publication as "uneducated plowboy"), and said that President Eisenhower was gutless and "two-faced" for failing to intervene. Once Armstrong had spoken, others followed suit, including Jackie Robinson and Eartha Kitt. In 1969, Armstrong turned down an invitation to play at the Nixon White House, suspecting that Nixon wanted only to placate black rage. ("Fuck that shit. . . . The only reason he would want me to play there now is to make some niggers happy.") On a personal level, he routinely encountered prejudice while touring and was well aware that his white celebrity colleagues never invited him to their homes. The pianist Erroll Garner once peeked into his dressing room and asked, "What's new?" Satchmo, right on the beat: "Nothin' new—white folks still ahead."

What Gillespie's and Davis's judgments miss is that jollity can be a form of strength. Armstrong couldn't imagine letting anyone, as he once said when dressing down a sideman, "fuck with my hustle." Some have understood this partially, supposing that Armstrong was studiously putting on a brave face; Ralph Ellison said that he was wearing a defensive "mask," with "sophistication and taste hiding behind clowning and crude manners." Teachout, similarly, concludes that he "returned love for hatred and sought salvation in work." But nothing Armstrong ever said or wrote suggests that he was hiding behind anything—"Look, you don't pose never!" he told an interviewer—nor was there any perceptible space in a joyous soul such as his for anything so gloomy as a quest for "salvation." To read him as defensively fashioning what we now call a "black identity" is presentist. Ellison came closer to understanding the essence of Armstrong when, in another context, he asked if it was possible for a people to "live and develop for over three hundred years simply by *reacting*?" Armstrong was, in his way, more advanced than those whose ethnic identities are radicalized by circumstance. His strength was that he did not react.

Armstrong's voluminous writings—which include two autobiographies and enough letters to constitute a de-facto lifetime journal—are a key to his uncontrived, comfortable essence. "My whole life has been happiness," he wrote to a friend. "I love everybody." And his achievement as a writer is considerable; Philip Larkin, in a review of the autobiography "Satchmo," praised the "compelling quality" of his prose. Armstrong wrote the way he played, with an orthographic jazz of underlinings and punctuation conveying shades of emphasis and attitude. Of his mentor King Oliver, for example:

> Sometimes I'd persuade Papa Joe (I calls him) to make the Rounds with me, after work, which would be—two o'clock in the A.M. It was real "Kicks—listening to music, Diggin' his thoughts—comments' etc.

Armstrong rounded out his fetish for self-documentation with hundreds of hours of home tape recordings of casual chat. Teachout is the first biographer to give us excerpts of these, including a delicious segment in which Armstrong tries to entice Lucille into bed at five in the morning: "It's up to you to keep the horn percolating." Lucille felt otherwise, and suggested, "Turn your tape off. In fact, erase off some of that shit." Luckily for us, he didn't, and the tapes offer, among much else, Armstrong chewing the fat with Redd Foxx, a recitation by Tallulah Bankhead, a talk with the baritone Robert Merrill, Israeli and Arabic folk songs, Martin Luther King, Jr.,'s funeral service, and the cast album of the 1970 stage musical "Applause." Armstrong curated these tapes as a hobby: a rooted soul, he felt he had something timeless to say.

W. E. B. DuBois famously wrote of a black "double consciousness," in which the American and the Negro are "two warring ideals in one black body." There was no such war in Armstrong. Giddins has observed how consistently those who knew Armstrong said that what you saw was what you got. He was a man entirely content with who he was, despite the imperfections of where he was. Just as paradigm-busting cannot be the only measure of Armstrong's musical career, his racial authenticity cannot be judged on the extent to which he challenged white power. While there would have been *no* civil-rights revolution without blacks dedicated to changing the social order, there is no reason not to celebrate others whose participation was less decisive, but who cheered from the sidelines while fashioning lives of quiet dignity. Armstrong's dignity was just louder.

Gillespie, eventually, realized this: "I began to recognize what I had considered Pops' grinning in the face of racism as his absolute refusal to let anything, even anger about racism, steal the joy from his life." Call it the pursuit of happiness: despite the tough world he had grown up in and the far from perfect one in which he made his career, Louis Armstrong really did believe that "It's a Wonderful World." And the way he played made others believe it, too. Charlie Holmes, one of his saxophone players, summed up this joyous exuberance perfectly:

> Other trumpet players would . . . be hitting high notes, but they sound like a flute up there or something. But Louis wasn't playing them like that. Louis was hittin' them notes right on the head, and *expanding*. They would be notes. He was hittin' *notes*. He wasn't squeakin'. They wasn't no squeaks. They were notes. Big, broad notes. . . . The higher he went, the *broader* his tone got—and it was beautiful! ♦

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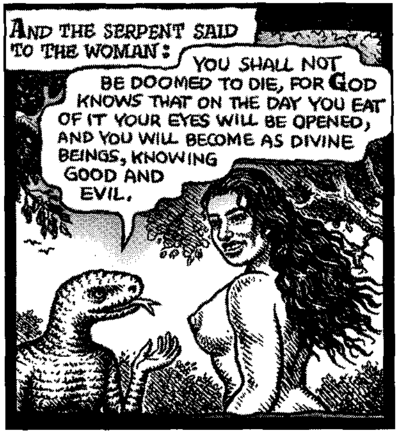

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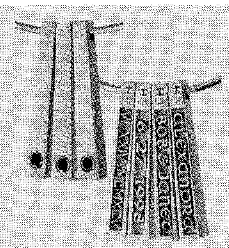

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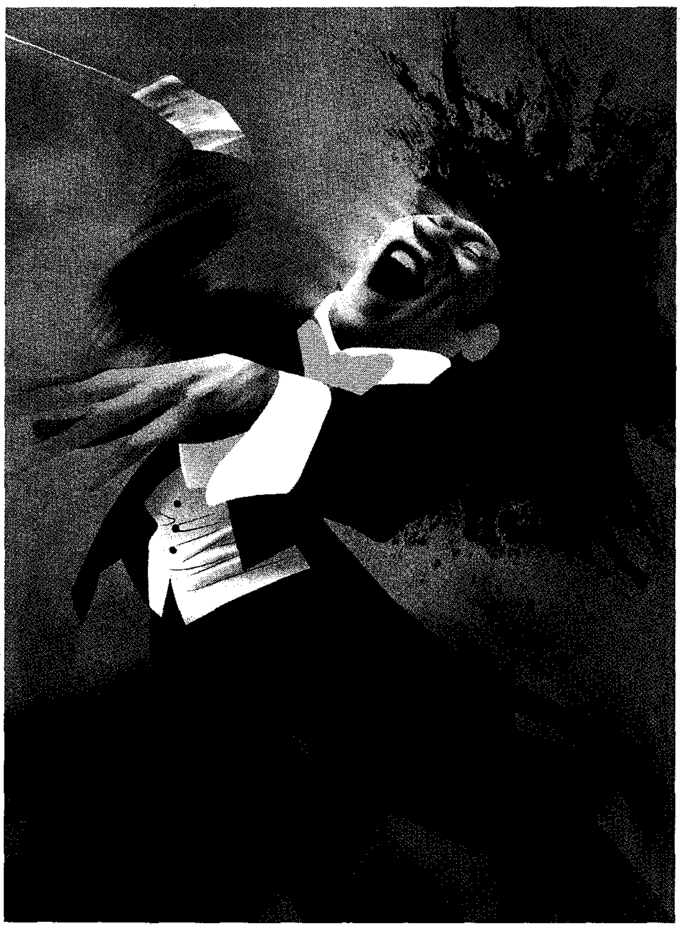
Gustavo Dudamel takes over the L.A. Philharmonic.

BY ALEX ROSS

The classical-music world has a fraught relationship with fame. On the one hand, people are always pining for the days when Arturo Toscanini, Leonard Bernstein, and Leontyne Price dominated the airwaves and appeared on the covers of magazines. On the other hand, whenever a contemporary classical musician brushes up against celebrity—this usually entails a segment on "60 Minutes," a Rolex ad, a photograph in *People*, and possibly the final slot on the "Tonight Show"—skeptics start to worry that the supposed avalanche of hype will wipe out any trace of artistic integrity. Such anxiety is not entirely misplaced: Luciano Pavarotti went from being the finest lyric tenor of the modern era to serving as the punch line for fat jokes. Then again, notions of the irreconcilability of commerce and art smack of college-dorm Marxism, and run counter to the spirit of Beethoven, Verdi, and Mahler, who addressed themselves passionately to the general public. Surely it is possible for a classical composer or performer to attain celebrity without surrendering to celebrity culture. Such a canny virtuoso might even persuade a terminally distracted Balloon Boy nation to pay attention to a forty-five-minute symphony.

Right now, all eyes are trained on the twenty-eight-year-old Venezuelan conductor Gustavo Dudamel, who took over as the music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic in October. In just five years on the international circuit, Dudamel has become one of the most famous classical musicians alive, his ascent heralded by TV profiles, front-page newspaper stories, and YouTube videos. When he inaugurated his Philharmonic tenure, at the Hollywood Bowl, a crowd of eighteen thousand people greeted him with a hollering, stamping, pop-star ovation. Just as impressive was the hush that fell over the Bowl during the ensuing performance—an intelligently plotted, flowingly musical account of Beethoven's Ninth. Some ways into the Adagio, with Dudamel coaxing intricately expressive, aria-like playing from the violins against softly glowing choirs of winds, the hoopla receded and Beethoven took charge. Such feats of immersion explain why this young man has caused unaccustomed tremors of optimism in the classical world.


Dudamel seems impulsive, but his musical choices are controlled.

There are three main elements behind Dudamel's appeal. The first is his astonishing natural command of the art of conducting. Advance notice of his talent spread not through P.R. departments but in awestruck reports from such illustrious colleagues as Claudio Abbado and Simon Rattle, who encountered him on visits to Venezuela. Second, Dudamel has an infectious emotional energy that tends to win over jaded souls in audiences and orchestras alike. Not for him the stone-faced mask of seriousness; his bright eyes and wriggling features suggest that he revels in what he does. Finally, his Latino background puts a new face on an art that is widely viewed as an all-white affair. He is a product of El Sistema, Venezuela's legendary network of youth orchestras, which draws talent from the poorest sections of the country, and his perspective is bracingly different from that of the staid conservatory graduate.

Dudamel may yet burn out from all the attention, but the signs suggest otherwise. In person, you see a steeliness behind his ebullience. He is musically obsessed, intensely ambitious, and more than a bit radical. At the Bowl in October, before the main event of Beethoven's Ninth, he led the EXPO Center Youth Orchestra, a Philharmonic initiative, in a fuzzy but buoyant rendition of the Ode to Joy. Members of the audience remarked on the fact that the coveted stage-side seats at the Bowl, which are usually reserved for donors, had been given over to the families of the young musicians, most of whom came from South Central. It was a pointed, almost political gesture—like something that Bernstein would have done in his confrontational prime.

Dudamel long ago proved himself to be a master of roof-raising occasions. The real test of his abilities will come more gradually, as he goes about the daily business of running an Amer-

ANDRÉ CARRILHO

ican orchestra: conducting subscription concerts, planning future seasons, hiring musicians, soliciting donations, and—if he is truly a miracle worker—changing the complexion of the audience. Just before Thanksgiving, I returned to Los Angeles to hear how Dudamel and the Philharmonic worked together under more ordinary circumstances, in the regular subscription series at Disney Hall. I attended two consecutive performances of a high-minded, echt-Viennese program: Mozart's "Prague" and "Jupiter" Symphonies and Berg's Violin Concerto, with Gil Shaham as soloist. The works fell outside the late-Romantic and conservative-modern zones in which Dudamel has made his mark—his home turf of Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Bartók, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich.

They were elegant, thoughtful readings, proof of Dudamel's range. They were not, however, anything to put in the time capsule. Although Dudamel has the image of an impulsive conductor, a wild man of lunging arms and dancing feet, his musical choices tend to be controlled, sometimes a little predictable. He favored a lush, heavy sound in Mozart, as on old Karajan records. Strings outnumbered winds five to one—problematic in terms of balance, although the increasingly stellar Philharmonic woodwinds compensated with a series of vibrant solos. Tempos were on the slow side, bordering on the somnolent in the Andante of the "Prague" and the Minuet of the "Jupiter." Dudamel was at his best in the "Jupiter"'s slow movement, where he achieved the same exquisite layering of sustained and filigreed lines that made the Adagio of his Beethoven Ninth so memorable. For the most part, though, this Mozart needed punchier rhythms, cleaner dynamic contrasts, sharper details of articulation and phrasing.

The Berg Concerto, too, was curiously subdued. You might have expected Dudamel to wallow more in the veiled Mahlerian drama of Berg's orchestral writing. Yet the conductor was working to the advantage of his soloist. Shaham approaches this piece with uncommon sweetness, attaining at times a vividly vocal quality. Dudamel hovered in the background, presenting a muted color field on which Shaham could make his pastel strokes. In all, the program was rich in subtlety but short on electricity. It was good to see Dudamel challenging himself and the orchestra with such meaty fare so early in his tenure; the easier choice would have been to load the season with Romantic warhorses to keep the crowds happy. All the same, a noisy ovation greeted Dudamel after the last notes of the "Jupiter" sounded. Both orchestra and audience appear smitten.

Some breathless reports have anointed Dudamel the savior of classical music, but in L.A. no messiah is required; this orchestra has already been saved. Esa-Pekka Salonen, whose name went unmentioned in a "60 Minutes" profile of Dudamel, brought about a revolution during his seventeen years at the Philharmonic—a reorientation of the programming toward modern music, a tireless campaign to convince audiences of the power of the new, and an all-around aesthetic of adventure.

Fortunately, Salonen's vision now seems firmly implanted in the orchestra's identity. John Adams has assumed the post of creative chair, and while I was in town an Adams-curated festival—"West Coast, Left Coast," a celebration of California music—got under way at Disney Hall. The opening event was a bit chaotic, but it took surprising twists and turns: the Kronos Quartet played a wistful post-minimalist work by the film composer Thomas Newman; the duo Matmos presented two hypnotically dense electronic pieces; an ad-hoc ensemble tried out a meandering avant-gardish creation by the guitarist Michael Einziger, of Incubus; and, around midnight, Terry Riley, the founding father of minimalism, ascended to the organ loft to unleash a brilliantly bluesy improvisation.

Free-roaming concerts of this kind would be startling at most orchestras; at the Philharmonic, they are almost routine. How Dudamel adapts to the orchestra's fine-tuned experimentalism remains to be seen, but he seems eager to carry on Salonen's legacy, taking on a slew of new pieces and adding his awareness of Latin-American composers. Under Salonen, the Philharmonic became the most interesting orchestra in America; under Dudamel, it shows no signs of relinquishing the title. ♦

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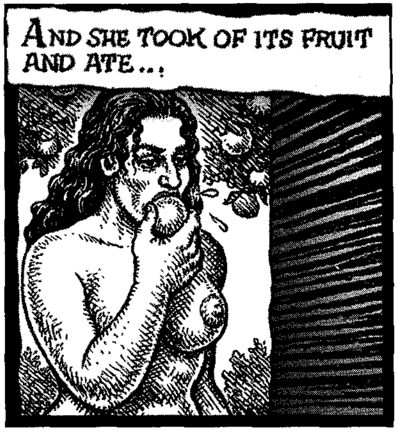

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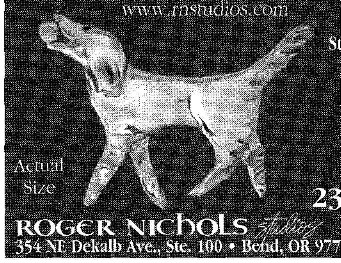
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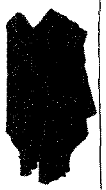
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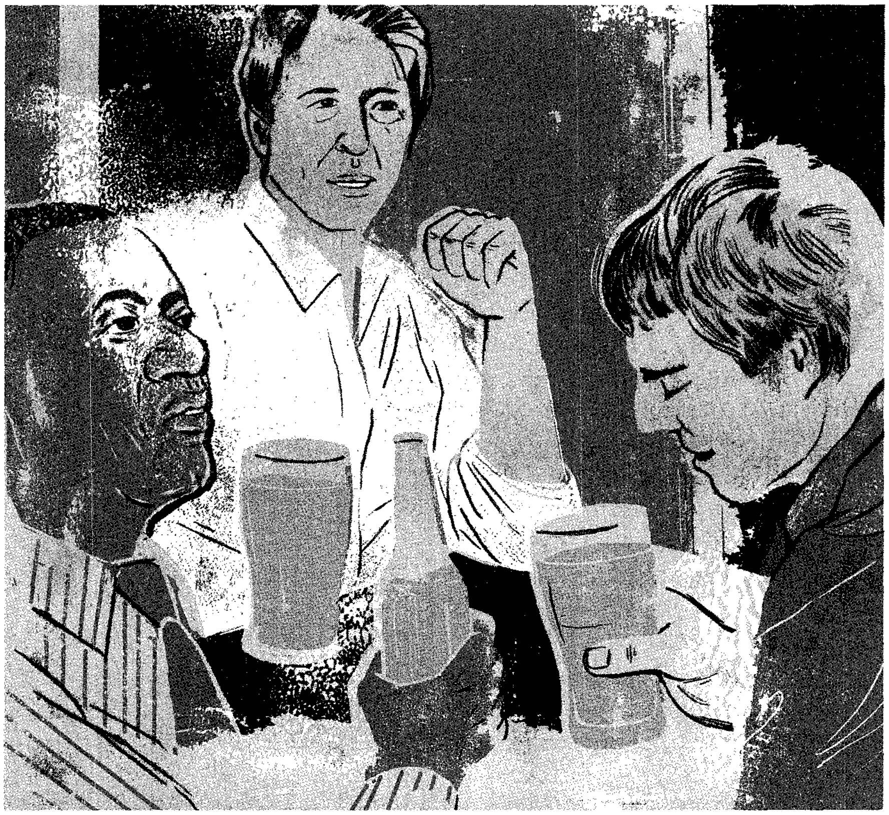
ON TELEVISION

SAD MEN

Comedy comes of age on TNT.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN



Braugher, Romano, and Bakula chew the fat in "Men of a Certain Age."

It's not the best time to be a middle-aged man in this country, but it's not a bad time for television shows about middle-aged men. This week, comedy comes to TNT, in the form of "Men of a Certain Age," an hour-long serious comedy, without a laugh track and with a more relaxed pace than the bullet-train setups and punch lines of conventional sitcoms. For women of a certain age, on the other hand, the glaring awfulness of "Cougar Town" stands out as this year's undeserved slap in the face, though perhaps there's some rough justice to seeing a forty-year-old mother as a tornado of insecurity and sexual mania—not that Courteney Cox has any believability in the role—after all the years that men have been portrayed as lunks, idiots, and TV-watching duds. (Who even knows if "Cougar Town" has a laugh track or a soundtrack? If it's there, it's drowned out by the show's humiliation track.) This season, ABC has a great show about men (and women) who are getting up there, "Modern Family," and a not entirely insulting one, "The Middle," and it has already cleared away some junk—the deadly sitcom "Hank," starring the ever more unwatchably brittle Kelsey Grammer. In general, the creative talents working in television comedy have been trying to push upward through the pavement of convention in order to grow. The touchstone for this movement—at least, on network television—was the one-camera, no-laugh-track comedy "Arrested Development," which débuted on Fox half a dozen years ago. That series, about a family that was living on the fumes of its delusions in an unfinished California housing development, was farcical and deadpan at the same time—all the characters, even the teen-agers, had a touch of middle-aged craziness. "Arrested Development" busted open the family sitcom, and just as important as what it achieved on that level was its fate in the world. Fox made the bold decision to equate "good show" with "worth renewing," and brought it back for a second season, despite its poor ratings. The series wasn't brilliant to the end (it lasted three seasons; two would have been fine), but that act of support inspired hope in both viewers and TV writers. (Now we're practically spoiled, as another treasured show, NBC's "Friday Night Lights," keeps not getting cancelled.)

"Men of a Certain Age" is bound to attract attention, because its co-creator, and one of its co-stars, is Ray Romano; what shouldn't be overlooked, however, is the fact that the show is also good. Surprisingly good, you might think, especially if, like me, you were put off by the character that Romano played in his long-running (1996-2005) sitcom, "Everybody Loves Raymond"—a schlubby, whiny husband whose hallmarks were reluctance and inattention. He was a pull toy for Patricia Heaton's brisk, demanding wife. The theme song for "Men of a Certain Age," a cover version of the Beach Boys' "When I Grow Up (To Be a Man)," plays over a montage of old home movies of little boys doing classic little-boy things and going through rites of passage: bicycling, running under the sprinkler, wearing superhero capes, teasing girls, throwing mortarboards in the air. The sequence makes you wonder whether the series' creators—Romano's co-creator is Mike Royce, a longtime writer and producer of "Raymond"—will go further than a checklist of boomer nostalgia. They do. As you get to know the characters better with each episode, the credit sequence becomes increasingly touching, underscoring the gifts that come with an American childhood and the true pains of adulthood. The last shot is of a boy throwing a balsa-wood airplane up into the air, and the joy and momentum—the sense of aliveness—expressed in the thrust of his arm as it launches the plane are almost heartbreaking.

The obvious sitcom take on the image would be that although you can still throw a plane at fifty—the age that the characters in "Men of a Certain Age" are pushing—you may tear your rotator cuff. But the show offers more perspective than that. It's almost as though it had a narrator telling you, in a voice-over from the

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

future, what the characters are going through, as in "The Wonder Years" and the movie "Stand By Me." Romano plays Joe, one of three former college friends in Los Angeles who still hang out together. He's separated from his wife, Sonia (Penelope Ann Miller), and living in a hotel room; the highlight of his morning routine is guessing the temperature before the automated voice of his wakeup call announces it. Andre Braugher is another of the friends, Owen, a father of three young children, whose morning starts with one of his kids dressed in a Hulk costume shooting foam balls at him and telling him, "Mommy said to get up 'cause you gotta go exercise." Scott Bakula is the hunky Terry, an unmarried and underemployed actor, whose active sex life calls forth envy and disapproval from his friends. When the three men head out of the city for a day hike, in the first episode, Joe hits a possum in the road and is torn about what to do. He can't tell whether it's dead or alive, and he decides that the only humane solution is to make sure it's dead, so he backs up over it, then pulls ahead again. It becomes clear that the possum is definitely not dead, as they look back and see it walking across the road. Of the three guys in the car, Joe is the most upset by this mess; at first, he thought he might have killed the animal, then he tried to kill the animal, and now he's left wondering whether it will die because of him. It's to the show's credit that this isn't (only) a metaphor for the uncertainty and the inevitable mistakes of adult life; the scene is viscerally disturbing, and you watch it closely, as if some magical method for undoing irreversible damage will reveal itself, not just to Joe but to you, too. The conversation among the men encompasses all that questioning and agonizing, without your feeling too heavily the creators' own middle-aged hands (Romano is a couple of weeks shy of fifty-two; the dewier Royce is in the middle of his journey between forty and fifty). There's real imagination at work.

The show cuts between short scenes of each man in his unique environment: Joe, who has two teen-age kids, arranging things with his wife, or taking care of his business, a party-supply store (Joe's Party Depot, it's called, and though you'd never think of Joe as promoting festiveness as such, he still likes fun things, like balloons); Terry at his office-temp job, which isn't really all that temp, alas, or going on an open call for a lame part in a lame show; and Owen struggling at the car dealership owned by his father, Owen, Sr. (Richard Gant), a mean bastard who thinks he's upholding family values when all he's really doing is crushing his son's spirit. (Oddly, "Men of a Certain Age" doesn't touch on the crumbling of the automobile industry, at least not in the first few episodes.) Then we linger with the men awhile as they get together at a coffee shop to shoot the breeze. (Yes, the movie "Diner" comes to mind; Barry Levinson should get royalties any time two or more men sit together at a coffee shop.) In one episode, Terry says that he doesn't like the idea of sales, because you never get anywhere; it's Sisyphean, he says—a word that the other two give him some grief for. Owen says that the goal is someday being the boss. Joe, who is his own boss, says that it's good to be the boss, but it changes things: "You're still you. Sometimes you're like, Who are you? All right, I'm the boss. But who *are* you? Looking in the mirror . . . you recognize yourself, but there's that little bit of you that you don't." Owen, his mouth full of hamburger, puts an end to Joe's ruminations: "This is that possum shit." Joe already has old-man worries; he can't read the small print on the ketchup bottle anymore, and says, "What if it's medication one day?" Of course, what's funny about this is that one day it *will* be a medication label that he has trouble reading.

Some elements of "Men of a Certain Age" are off: not for a second do you believe that Braugher's character would still be working for his father, and it's too bad that the creators succumbed to the urge to end the first episode with the self-seriously sad song "Reflections of My Life." But there's some real darkness to the show, and, despite the "Reflections" gaffe, "Men of a Certain Age" doesn't wallow in its own melancholy, though it could: Joe has a gambling problem, Owen has diabetes, and Terry is beginning to feel hollow without a family. One night, outside his store, Joe looks up at a big promotional balloon figure with a smiling face. It's just a balloon, but with the wind whipping it around in the light of the parking lot it looks threatening. What "Men of a Certain Age" illustrates is that when you reach that certain age life gets scary all over again. ♦

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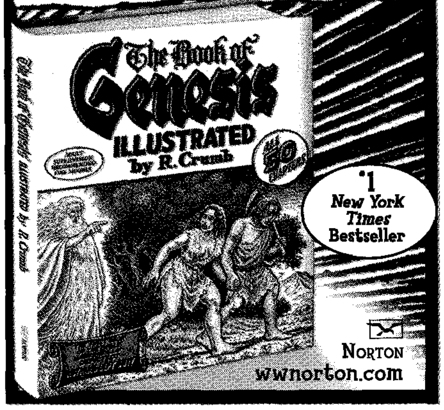

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POP MUSIC

JESUS RETURNS

Indecent acts of origami.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

In 1987, the singer David Yow and the bassist David Sims were at loose ends after their band, Scratch Acid, broke up. Based in Austin, Scratch Acid was a volcanic, loopy, and virtuosic group led by one of the few singers who can convincingly claim Iggy Pop as an influence. Yow and Pop both use their bodies as much as their voices to transmit information, and that information always includes the message "Anything goes." Pop was famous for cutting himself and smearing himself with peanut butter; Yow, at the one Scratch Acid show I saw, in the eighties, pulled what looked like peanut butter, or worse, out of his pants and threw it into the audience. (It was flour, water, and food coloring.) Yow is less herky-jerky than Pop—he throws his body around without any particular rhythmic predictability, seeming to engage with an invisible opponent. Sometimes they do a jig; other times he crouches as if grabbed from behind, or kicks as if shaking off the pincers of a persistent crab.

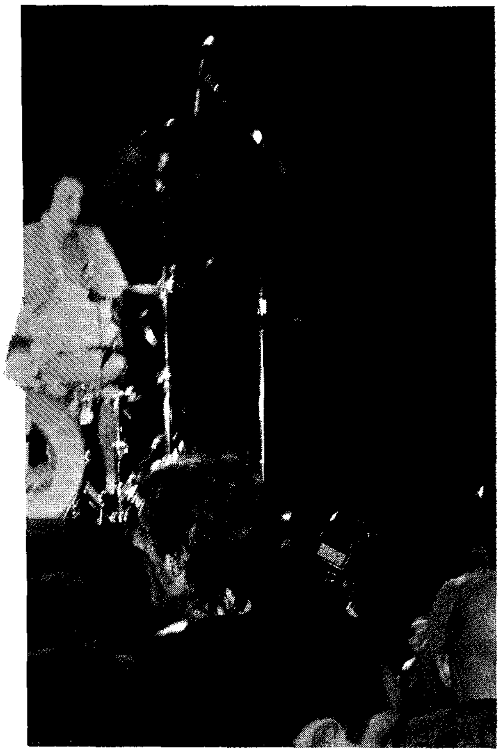
At Jesus Lizard shows, David Yow becomes the physical property of the audience, but there's an unspoken contract that nobody touch

With the guitarist Duane Denison and a drum machine, Yow and Sims became the Jesus Lizard, and in 1989 put out an EP, "Pure." Soon after, the band added the drummer Mac McNeilly and recorded its first full-length album, "Head," the following year. By the next album, "Goat," from 1991, the band had sorted out how to do what it did best. The action in Jesus Lizard songs is in the contrast between the tight, regular grid that the three players create and the way Yow jumps all over it. As a singer, he's not much interested in melody; rather, he acts like a storyteller who has just arrived, out of breath and perhaps drunk, with the need to tell us something unsettling. Over the course of six studio albums and three EPs, Yow screamed, moaned, spat, hollered, and barked—it's hard to find anything on them as pedestrian as singing. The lyrics are unwholesome. The first words of "Puss," from the 1992 album "Liar," are "Get me something to stop the bleeding," and it's soon clear that the bleeder is either the singer or a woman who has been "punched in the jaw." In the chorus, Yow repeats, "Get her out of the truck," and not likely because he intends to take her to the hospital. Yow's lyrics are peopled by drunks who hit one another, annoying "mouth breathers," seasick guys who can't swim, and others in physically perilous situations.

If Yow embodies chance and volatility, the band has the reliability and strength of a large, lonely machine. Few people have ever played straight time with as much gusto as McNeilly; when he locks in with Sims, the drums and the bass make a single menacing vamp sound terrifying for two solid minutes. Any musician who feels the need to fancify time signatures would do well to study the Jesus Lizard. The band makes 4/4 time seem like an enormous playground, far from the view of authorities.

The group broke up in 1999, but Touch & Go, one of the most respected independent labels of the eighties and nineties, has just reissued the bulk of the band's discography—sadly, these may be the label's last releases—and you can hear all the circuit-board detail and power on "Liar," which is as good as any hard-rock record made in the past twenty years.

About a year ago, Yow, who is now a graphic designer at a Los Angeles advertising agency, Sims, now an accountant, Denison, and McNeilly decided to try re-forming. All four told me how they worried about doing their legacy a disservice. ("I started using a treadmill to get in shape," Yow said. "I couldn't do much about my gut, but I did improve my stamina.") After practicing for three days at Denison's house, in Nashville, the band played their first shows, in Minehead, England. I saw them in September, at the All Tomorrow's Parties festival, in the Catskills. It may have been the only reunion show I've ever seen where I forgot almost immediately that the band hadn't played together in more than a decade. Sims performed, as he often does, planted with one leg in front of the other, and whipping the neck of his bass upward on downbeats. (There is something vaguely nautical about the band; Sims often makes me think that he's on the prow of the S.S. Lizard, taking stock of the roiling sea.)



e band. Photograph by Landon Nordeman.

Denison is more of a stoic, and in the Catskills he looked the part, with his silver hair and gray bowling shirt. He now plays a custom-made aluminum guitar. His musical lines could be a metallic alloy as well—light but unyielding. His playing isn't prone to feedback or scrabbling, and he has little interest in being the loudest member of the band. His clipped rhythmic figures feel like threats or occult messages, sinister without being brawny.

At the Catskills show, I couldn't always tell who was doing what. (I do remember two of Yow's bits of Dada banter: "If I were you guys, I'd be you guys"; "Happy 9/11, everybody!") Last month, at the Fillmore New York, everything was clear. At the start of the group's spectacular set, Yow—already loosening his shirt—wanted the lights turned up. "Just make them really fucking bright. Doesn't matter how ugly they are."

The band played a long set, and in an hour and a half the intensity never let up. Yow gave the most Yow-like performance I've ever seen. Within minutes, he was drifting atop the crowd, where he often spends at least half of a Jesus Lizard show. (Though Yow almost becomes the physical property of the audience, there is an unspoken contract that nobody touches the instrumentalists.) What emerges in the live setting is not just Yow's fearlessness but the weirdly sweet streak that runs through all the sweaty tough-guy activity. When a Jesus Lizard song is drawing to its close and Yow is far from the stage, with his microphone cord lying across the crowd like a buoy tie, people make sure to pass him back so that he arrives in time for the beginning of the next song. At the Fillmore, Yow formed a bond with the bouncer nearest the front of the crowd, rubbing his shoulders and massaging his scalp after being safely deposited back onstage.

Yow spat, danced in his black cowboy boots, held the mike up to his biceps, and pulled out various parts of his genitals. He has turned these acts of indecency into a kind of origami over the years, sometimes prompting puzzled audience members to ask each other, "What's in his hand?" Seeing the Jesus Lizard live makes almost any other band seem like a bunch of layabouts by comparison. The morning after the Fillmore show, I found myself rubbing my belly and kicking empty boxes in my apartment. I didn't have a song repeating in my head—it was just David Yow's body. ♦

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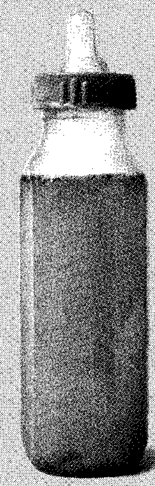
Sasha Frere-Jones looks back at 2009.



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THE CURRENT CINEMA

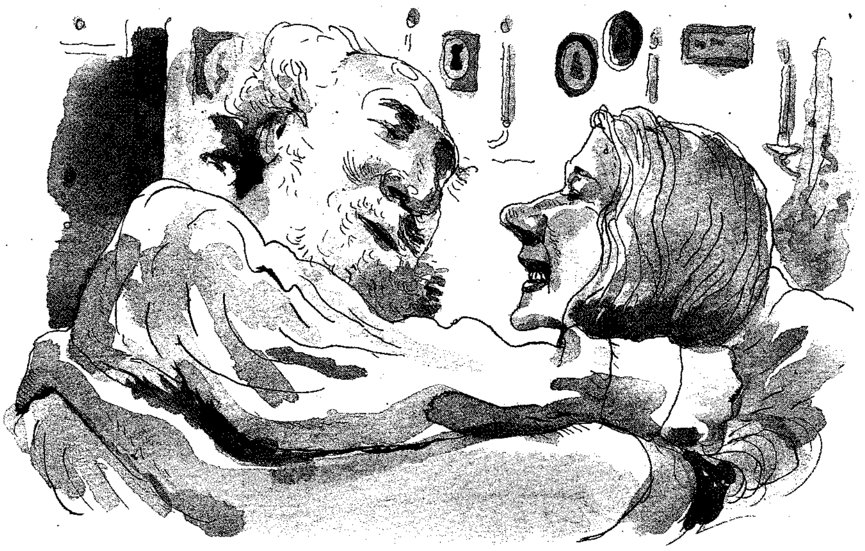
LOVE HURTS

"The Last Station," "Crazy Heart," "Brothers," and "The Lovely Bones."

BY DAVID DENBY

In "The Last Station," Christopher Plummer, at the crest of a long career, gives an impassioned portrait of the artist as an old man—Leo Tolstoy in his eighties, imposing, stentorian, and almost alarmingly active. Helen Mirren, letting her age show and still the most sexual actress onscreen, is his equal as Sofya, Tolstoy's wife of forty-eight years. Like Tolstoy, Sofya is built along heroic, Old Testament lines: she has borne him thirteen children; she has copied out "War and Peace" in longhand six times; she has run his household and loves him as passionately as ever. Based on Jay Parini's 1990 novel, which draws heavily on diaries kept by the couple and by other men and women in their circle, this production, directed by Michael Hoffman, is like a great night at the theatre—the two performing demons go at each other full tilt and produce scenes of Shakespearean affection, chagrin, and rage.

The year is 1910, and Tolstoy is an uneasy survivor in the new century—he's bemused by a phonograph playing in his garden at Yasnaya Polyana. (A fine old house in Germany doubles as the estate.) As he approaches death, he and Sofya fight over his will. Shall he leave the vastly profitable copyrights of his worldly masterpieces to his wife and their children? Or shall he bequeath them to the "Russian people," to be administered by an organization that propagates his late-in-life obsessions—a cultish neo-Christian, neo-socialist religion that runs communes, advocates passive resistance to violence, and renounces sexuality? Sofya's nemesis in the struggle is Tolstoy's chief disciple and administrator, the fanatical Chertkov (Paul Giamatti), who introduces into the estate a youthful spy, Valentin (James McAvoy), a celibate and an avowed Tolstoyan, who becomes the writer's secretary. He's so awed that he can barely get a word out when he and Tolstoy first meet, but his disapproval of the flesh disappears overnight after Masha (Kerry Condon), a terrifically flirtatious and intelligent fellow-acolyte, climbs into his bed. Hoffman makes the scenes between the young lovers genuinely erotic, so it's not hard to guess which side the movie chooses in the philosophical dispute between asceticism and sensuality. Hoffman doesn't parody Tolstoy's religious and pedagogical beliefs, which, after all, exerted a major influence on Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., yet the movie implicitly suggests that exalted, self-denying spirituality, however noble, is less powerful as a guide to living than everyday love. Tolstoy, no fanatic in his own cause, seems to know this. In a beautifully written scene, played with wistful longing by Plummer, the old man, talking to Valentin as they sit together in the forest at Yasnaya Polyana, describes the early years of his marriage as a kind of terrifying paradise.



Christopher Plummer and Helen Mirren as the Tolstoys in Michael Hoffman's movie.

BARRY BLITT

Hoffman's career has wandered all over the place—he made the uproarious pop comedy "Soapdish," in 1991, and a mediocre "Midsummer Night's Dream," in 1999. In this movie, he achieves a new expressiveness, fluidity, and power. "The Last Station" may not be original in form, but it's vibrantly alive, with many scenes of scathing directness that seem to come straight out of Russian novels (though the pitch of feeling is closer to Dostoyevsky's hyperthyroid manner than to Tolstoy's firmer, calmer tone). The juiciest material is Sofya's detestation of Chertkov, whose celibacy she suspects is really just a cover for homosexuality. In any case, she's sure that he's a poseur and an opportunist, disguising his self-seeking with a veneer of piety. And for her Tolstoy's anti-sensual bent is rubbish—this is a man of huge lusts, who showed her his diaries of youthful whoring before their wedding. Sofya's situation is pitiable: she still wants her husband sexually, and will do anything to lure him back to bed and destroy his ideological purity. Helen Mirren may be the only actress who can beg for sex without losing a ferocious pride. Her Sofya, dressed in white like a bride, her hair long and full, makes scenes, howls, and gets thrown about by her own anger and desire like a rag doll in a storm. It's the most emotionally naked work of Mirren's movie career; she gives poetic form to the madness and the violence of commonplace jealousy. Her look of pleading and then of tenderness toward Plummer is heartbreaking.

Plummer, who is turning eighty himself, effortlessly suggests largeness of spirit even in foolish old age. Physically, he seems enormous. His eyes devour McAvoy's Valentin—his Tolstoy is hungry for information about everyone. He doesn't see why he has to choose between his wife and his followers; he wants everyone's love, and Sofya makes life at the estate complete hell. For him, there is no peace, except in flight and in death. In all, the movie is worthy of its valiant pair. The splendor and the amplitude of Yasnaya Polyana affirm in every scene the magnificence of the sensuous world that Tolstoy, with ambiguous energy, and many fond backward glances, so desperately wants to renounce.

There's another piece of extraordinary acting knocking about in the crowded Christmas season. What Jeff Bridges pulled off as a joke in "The Big Lebowski," lazing like a walrus, he does seriously in "Crazy Heart." As Bad Blake, a well-travelled country singer, he's a barely functioning mess, with a ratty beard and ponytail, a large belly, and a constant cigarette and glass of bourbon. Bad was once a famous performer and songwriter, and he's written for other people, including the darkly handsome young country sensation Tommy Sweet (Colin Farrell), who openly acknowledges him as a mentor. But now Bad drives alone through vast stretches of the Southwest, drifting from saloon to bowling alley, performing with ragged pickup bands. He can still sing, a little, though he may not make it through a set without exiting the stage to go heave in an alley. The rest of the time, he lies on his back in a squalid motel. As an actor, Bridges luxuriates in indolence, but Bad, unlike the sublime Dude in "Lebowski," is not pleased with himself. He's played out and past caring, and Bridges, muttering in a crabbed voice, suggests a formidable intelligence fighting through a fog of drink and sloth. Bridges takes the character to the pits, but he's spiritually active there, at the bottom; he knows that Bad has to be shrewd, and still proud in defeat, or the audience would find him contemptible.

Maggie Gyllenhaal, ardent, her round face glowing, turns up as Jean Craddock, a journalist and a single mother, who penetrates the gloom of Bad's motel room for an interview. At the start, his attitude toward her is wary and distant, but he's stirred by her interest and her loneliness. The first-time director, Scott Cooper, working from a novel by Thomas Cobb, keeps the camera close to these two, and the way that Bridges and Gyllenhaal ease into an affair—drawing together, pulling back, and starting again—feels right. Jean, who must also look after her four-year-old son, wakes up the decrepit singer, but this is not a movie about miracles. Nor is "Crazy Heart" quite a miracle itself. It has a gentle, unforced rhythm, and what's there is good and true. But there's not enough of it—the movie needs more plot, more complication, more conflict—and it suffers from the mood of weary resignation embedded in Bad's songs, whose general theme is "What the hell, nothing can be done about it." If ever a movie demonstrated how country music emerges from private sorrows, this is it. But something can always be done to make a movie better.

"Brothers," the new home-from-the-war film, written by David Benioff and directed by Jim Sheridan, has been made with obvious devotion and sincerity, and I wish I could take it seriously. The movie is based on the 2004 Danish film "Brodre," but it feels like a 1948 Arthur Miller play, without Miller's toughness. Sam Shepard plays a dominating alcoholic father, a former marine who has long tormented his two sons, turning one, Sam (Tobey Maguire), into a high achiever, both athlete and war hero, dutifully serving multiple tours in Afghanistan; and the other, Tommy (Jake Gyllenhaal), into a resentful, unemployable screwup. When Sam is captured, his wife, Grace (Natalie Portman), believing that he's dead, leans toward Tommy, who pulls himself together and helps her raise her and Sam's two young children. Then Sam returns, nearly destroyed by what he had to do to survive in Afghanistan. Will he be capable of resuming his marriage? There's not much rooting interest for us, since Maguire and Portman don't go together in the first place. He's humorless and ungainly, and odd-looking in his high-and-tight military haircut; she's elfin and flawlessly pretty, and unconvincing as an ex-cheerleader turned mother of two, and they don't set off the dimmest of sparks in each other. With the exception of Jake Gyllenhaal, whose

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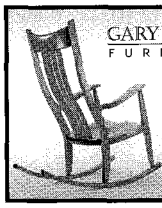
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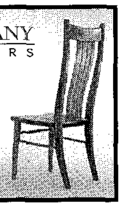

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shambling self-disgust hits the only genuine note, the movie is a classic of Hollywood miscasting and ambition gone askew. Maguire, playing crazy when Sam comes home, opens his eyes wider and wider, as if he were trying to pop them out of his head. For three-quarters of an hour or so, you wait for him to blow. And blow he does, shrieking and smashing things in a display that seems more like pyrotechnics than like acting. To understand how this kind of role can be done with nuance and eloquence, see Ben Foster's work in "The Messenger," a movie devoted to similar themes but finer in every way.

Of all human illusions, the hardest to give up is the belief that consciousness exists after death. This may seem a stiffly rational response to anything as shrewdly executed as Alice Sebold's best-selling 2002 novel, "The Lovely Bones," but it becomes inescapable when you see the bizarre and sentimental movie that Peter Jackson has made from the book. In the movie, as in the book, Susie (Saoirse Ronan), a fourteen-year-old girl, narrates her own murder, in 1973, at the hands of a neighborhood creep (Stanley Tucci). Then she watches him cover his tracks, and her father (Mark Wahlberg), her mother (Rachel Weisz), and her sister (Rose McIver) try to cope with her death. She is not merely present in their minds; they can't quite see her, but she is there, prompting, warning, claiming a kiss from her handsome teen boyfriend.

The book was brought off with considerable delicacy—it's really an affectionately detailed portrait of a suburban girl's life. Literalized in the movie, the material is closer to a high-toned ghost story. Jackson intermingles family goings on with Susie's gossamer interventions, and some of the brushed-with-ether imagery verges on the uncanny. Yet Jackson has become an undisciplined fabulist: the movie is redundant and undramatic. Heaven is notoriously harder to make interesting than Hell, but Jackson has outdone other artists in cotton candy—there are luscious hills and dales, and gleaming lakes and fields of waving grain, and sugarplum fairies with music by Brian Eno rather than by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky. "The Lovely Bones" has been fashioned as a holiday family movie about murder and grief; it's a thoroughly queasy experience. The lesson that Susie has to learn is that she must "let go" of her past life. Meanwhile, skilled, opportunistic artificers like Alice Sebold and Peter Jackson won't let go of a chance to mingle life and death. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM/GO/DENBY2009
David Denby's top ten films of the year.

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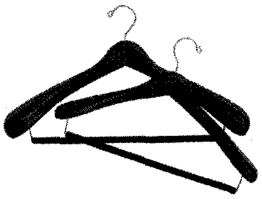

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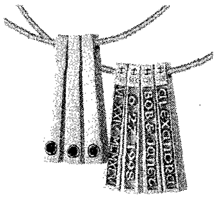

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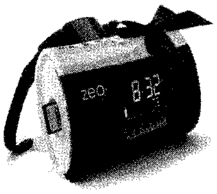

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Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Paul Noth, must be received by Sunday, December 13th. The finalists in the November 30th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the January 4th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the U.S. or Canada (except Quebec) age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

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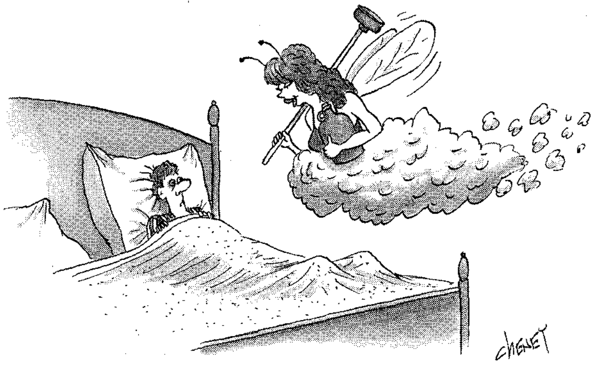
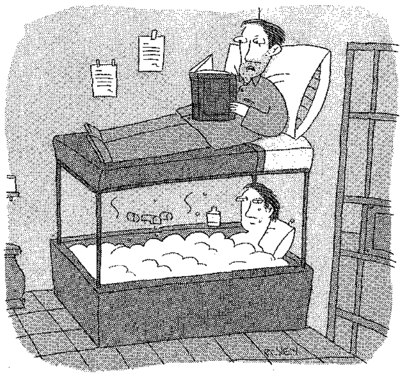


"I'm your fairy god plumber."
Laurence Lytton, New York City



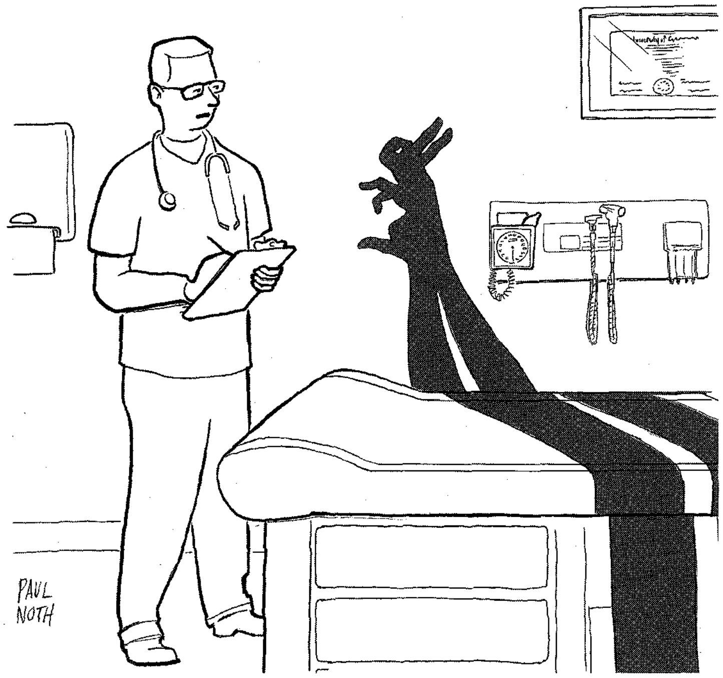
THE FINALISTS

"So you're the infamous Sudsy Malone."
Dave Barber, Columbus, Ohio

"Couldn't you just have had a last-meal request like everyone else?"
William Babula, Santa Rosa, Calif.

"It says Martha Stewart once lived here."
Laurence Lytton, New York City

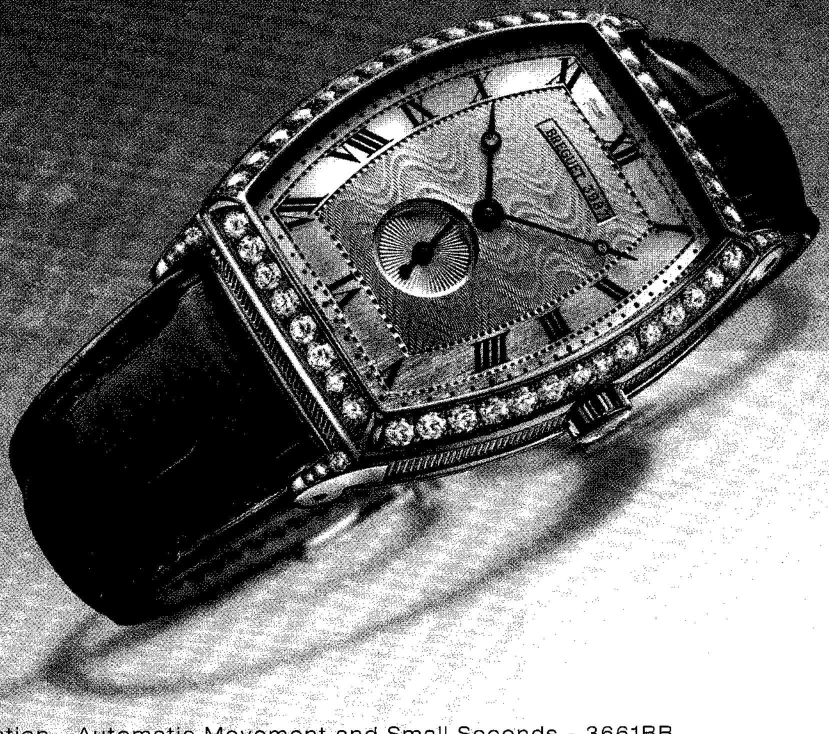
THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

Rodolphe found Mademoiselle
Laure at the trysting place.
“Good,” said he, “for punctuality
she is a feminine Breguet.”

Henry Murger, “Scenes of Bohemian Life”, 1848
The work that inspired Puccini for his opera “La Bohème”



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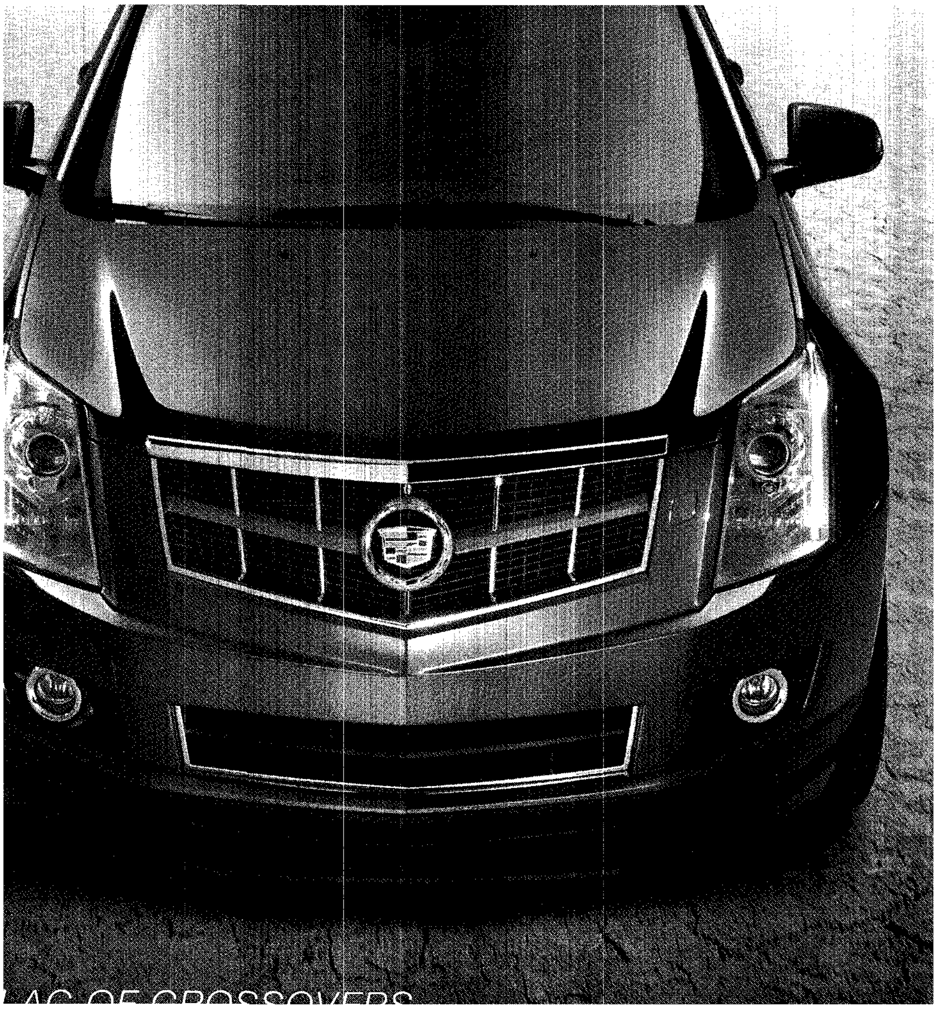
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